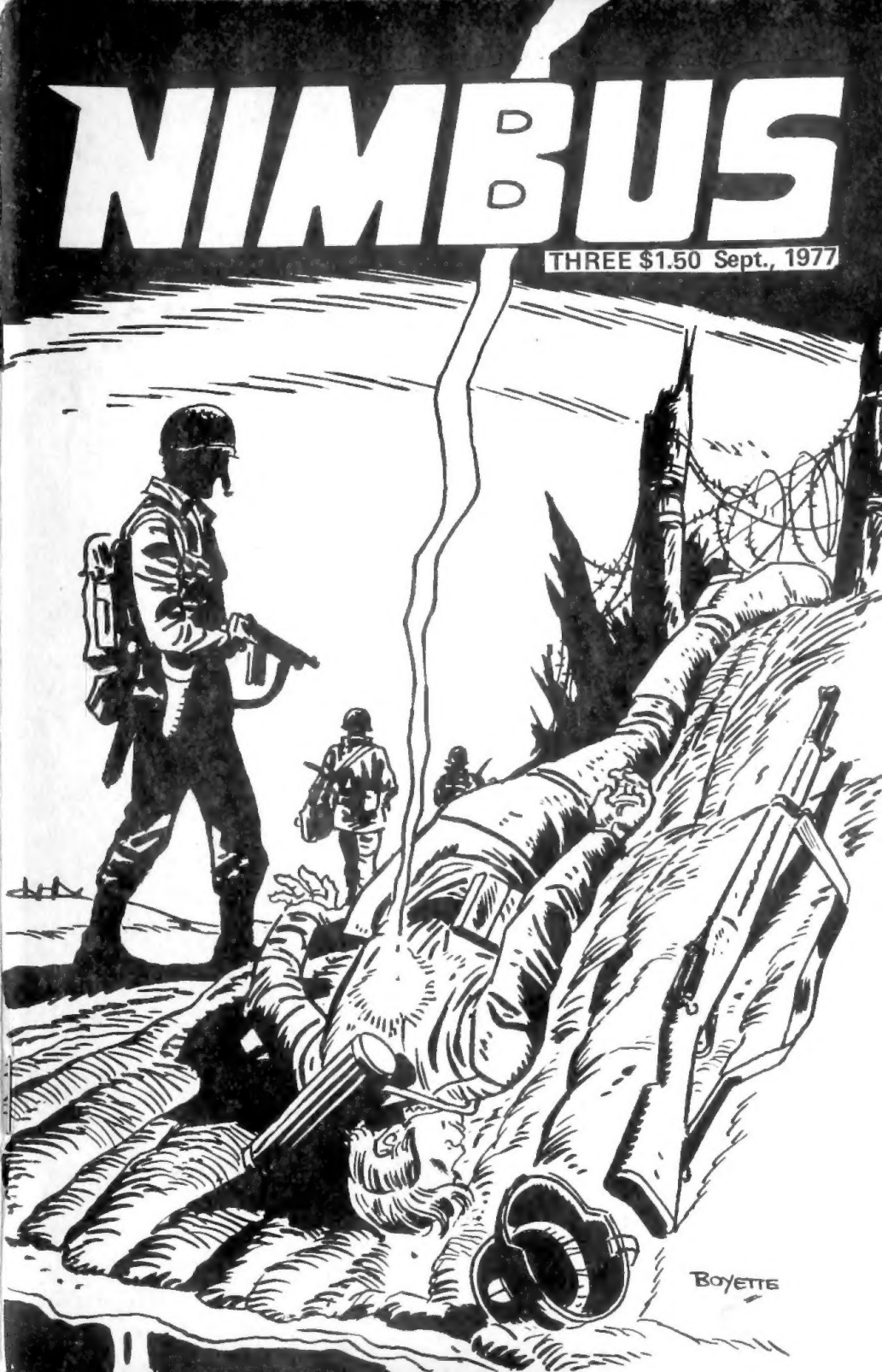
NIMBUS

THREE $1.50 Sept., 1977



STORMBRINGER
LEIYOHA

SWAN SONG
THE NIMBUS FILE

My goodness, Lord--what a long, strange trip it's been...

I sit before the hum of an electric typewriter, its glaring orange eye keeping steady watch that I don't fall asleep. It's 3 A.M., with about two hours work left to do. I'm leaving with some friends for Florida at 6 A.M.-- It's going to be awfully close.

So here we are, NIMBUS THREE. Great. Wonderful. The first two issues were critical successes, the kind of crowned ego-boost every editor dreams of.

We also lost money.

But hey, what the hell, that's life and art and business, ain't it? We fight day by day the recurring hassles of contemporary living, and we each make do as best we can.

Sometimes we get breaks, both good and bad. NIMBUS THREE is brought to you courtesy of one of the good ones.

This issue was thankful in coming. We'd planned on a big war/anti-war issue of NIMBUS for a long, long time. Things happened, as is explained below, and it never came about. This issue, as you can see, is based partly on that theme and in part on other projected issues' material.

And none of this would have happened if not for Sam de la Rosa.

Honest, folks. One day Sam said to me, "Let's put out one more issue and clear up the backlog," and after considering the matter carefully--and I can do the wildest two-second analysis in the world, y'know!--I dutifully agreed.

Not that it was easy--since we've spoken last, all the flowers grew, and the private world I and my/our compatriots inhabited suddenly evolved. Mark Gasper and Ralph Macchio, dear friends who were to do a more extensive study of SGT. FURY in a piece-triumvirate both got preoccupied. Ralph, of course, is at Marvel, and my old pal Mark is out making movies (or was that making babies, Mark? We never could tell what you were up to!)

Pete Gillis, who is unabashedly my favorite fan-writer, has gone pro, working for a major Chicago featurezine, and now Pete tells me he's going to Europe to pursue a doctorate in Germanic Lit.

Now doesn't that unplug your heating pad?!

Dave Fryxell, the perennial villian of the piece, is editor of his college newspaper and likes to pick fights with Dave Micheline.

Don McGregor, always one hell of a writer, craftsman, and all-around hell-of-a-person is still in New York, working on a couple of projects. One of them is a novel of cinematic proportions, and the other is a graphic novella with the inimitable Paul Gulacy. The title: SABRE! But a far different one than what first appeared in the Killraven strip. A full-size illustration of the concept should be our inside back cover and leads us to...

Dean Mullaney, comic fan, writer, big-game hunter, Wall Street finagler, and publisher of the abovementioned graphic novella. He co-publishes the charming magazine, WOWEEKAZOWIE! (so help me, that's what it's called!) and the latest issue, edited by Pete Iro--$1.50 to 455 Potomac Ave., Buffalo, N.Y. 14213--has some great stuff by Gene Day, Jim Hanley, Jerry Ordway, Jack Frost, Bill Neville, Kim Thompson, K.J. Robbins, Gene Phillips, Sam de la Rosa and Dean Mullaney, plus it has 3 comic strips: Victory by Willie Blyberg, Elasticworm by Tim Corrigan and Capt. Star by the multi-talented Pete Iro(he's now inking & lettering for Marvel). DEFINITELY worth a look-see!

You do remember Karl Kesel, Steve Leialoha, Mac Patterson, Sam de la Rosa, and Ric Cruz, right? They're all back and their art is better than ever. Other fan artists include Todd Klein, Jerry Ordway, Pete Iro,Willie Blyberg, Doug Hazelwood, Carl Taylor, William M. Neville,Kerry Gamill, and more.

On the other side of the coin, friend Mike Zeck supplied us with some really fine artwork, as did gentleman by the names of Mike Grell, Frank McLaughlin, and others. Through Sam's connections came Gene Colan, Walt Simonson, Mike Vosburg, Klaus Janson , John Buscema, Bill Everett, Rocke Mastroserio, Ernie Chan, John Romita, Alex Toth, and whoever else has joined us!

Special thanks go out to Pat Boyette for taking time to do a fantastic cover for us, thanks Pat.

My thanks go to the writers who've been with us--Pete, Dean, Dave, Paul Kupperberg, Chris Negri, and the maniacal Gene Kehoe. And of course, to Tony Isabella for taking time to do our most unusual interview(conducted 2 years ago).

And of all people, Dick Ayers, one of the founding forces of Marvel Comics, worked extensively with us to make our article on Sgt. Fury the most comprehensive piece most likely ever done for a war comic. After Pete Gillis' piece on the Marvel Westerns for NIMBUS ONE, it's amazing the Darlin' One still speaks to us! He's working at DC now, and teaching, I believe, in White Plains, N.Y. Best of luck, Dick.

Finally, thanks to Des Jones once again for our incredible logo, and a special acknowledgement to publisher Sam de la Rosa, whose faith, integrity, hard work--and money--made this possible.

But despair not. We'll all be back, somewhere, again. Writing's ingrained in my blood, so watch out! We're taking a pit stop, but the track's still there to burn. Take care, folks.

FRANK LOVECE

NIMBUS THREE $1.50 Sept., 1977. Editor: Frank Lovece, Layout & Design: Sam de la Rosa and Anna Nieto, Head Typesetter, Photostats: Christopher Ng, Assistant Typesetter: Lynda Escareno, Publisher: Sam de la Rosa. All characters used herein are © their respective companies; Marvel and DC. The Avenging Armadillo is © 1977 by Doug Hazelwood. SABRE is © by Don McGregor and Paul Gulacy. Entire contents © 1977 by Sam de la Rosa and may not be reproduced without his written permission. Publisher's office located at 328 Canavan, San Antonio, Texas 78221. Editorial office located at 947 Maple Drive, No.15, Morgantown, W. Va. 26505.

FURY GOT HIS GUN

BY FRANK LOVECE WITH THANKS TO DICK AYERS

The climate was undoubtedly damp, like the moist grey air one feels in his lungs before a storm. You knew something was coming, but you could not say what it would be. It was still early in the year 1963, still early in that decade, and the Marvel Age was just then beginning to catch on.

You could still browse through those post-Camelot racks for only 12 cents a shot. FANTASTIC FOUR No. 14 and SPIDER-MAN No. 2 were on the stands. Iron Man was still golden and bulky. The last issue of the abortive HULK magazine had just come out; the Avengers and Daredevil had yet to appear. Joe Sinnott was drawing Thor.

Outside, in the real world, the hysteria of the Cold War had begun to melt with the avoidance of a third world war. Richard Nixon had lost in California long ago, and Major Leroy Cooper had yet to orbit the earth a record 22 times. Across one ocean, a small band named the Beatles had released a grand total of two singles.

Across the other, a small land in Asia would soon be smothered by bombs and by hate and by diplomacy.

Take it as you will--time and commercial sentiment dictated the debut of SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOES.

As was everything else at the time, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Dick Ayers were the perpetrators. FURY was, at first, merely a typical war comic done in Marvel's decidedly atypical style of characterization and hyperbole, but the book was unlike most war comics done throughout the decades: First, FURY was not an issue-by-issue collection of gutsy five-page vignettes of (as Pete Gillis so aptly put it once), "green recruit becoming a man by disemboweling a North Korean"; rather, the book featured a regular stock that remained quite stable through the entire run. Also, the book was unlike most group comics in that the cast were not all WASP, but instead, a superb melting pot of various religions, races, colors, and creeds, an incredible challenge to do naturalistically yet inoffensively. Finally, the characters in FURY were delightfully different--boisterous, rowdy, loud and raucous, they were capable one moment of sloshing down beer kegs amidst Lee/Kirby English taverns, and awakening the next moment to reenactments of every war movie ever made. Those dudes were rough.

Like most war comics, however, FURY depended on World War II as a setting. The reason for using that epoch--at least in FURY--was probably that Viet Nam and Korea were still too fresh, too controversial, to deal with consistently in a commercial market. The Second World War also presented a polar dichotomy of ethics that allowed for a story to be told--and more often than not, an anti-war point to be made--without undue controversy for simply controversy's sake.

As Reitberger and Fuchs mention in the book COMICS, "The Howling Commandoes sport Gabriel Jones, the Negro who can blow the trumpet so well; Dino Manelli, the Hollywood star of Italian origin; Izzy Cohen, the Jewish mechanic from Brooklyn; Dum-Dum Dugan, the red-haired Irishman, and Rebel Ralston, the guy from the deep South." Add to that list their leader, Sgt. Nick Fury, and Junior Juniper, the college kid. There would, eventually, be others. In 104 issues of SGT. FURY with new stories (plus 4 giant-sized new annuals), the lives of most of the Howlers--and especially those who later joined the Marvelverse governmental espionage agency, SHIELD--were depicted over a span of some 25 or more years. In their myriad appearances and guest shots throughout the years, we were given their lives in pieceworks as they eventually became integrated from the midst of World War II to the Marvelverse today.

Nick Fury himself is an interesting character. Born and bred in the sidewalks of Hell's Kitchen --the Bronx--Fury was a streetfighter, a tough kid. His father had been a World War 1 flyer; his widowed mother had to struggle with raising two other children besides Nick in 1930's New York. (An early story erroneously listed Fury as an orphan.) By 1940, the trouble-shooting Fury was in England, accompanied by a long-time friend, Red Hargrove. Both bucked starvation by hiring on as--get this--parachute instructors, and Fury's stay in Britain resulted in his first meeting with a U.S. Army Lieutenant Sam Sawyer, and later, with an outwardly surly circus strongman from Boston, Dum-Dum Dugan. The former would eventually serve as the command nucleus of the special ranger squadron that (while officially the First Attack Squad) would be known as the Howling Commandoes; the latter would later become its second-in-command.

By mid-1941, Fury found himself jobless, and so enlisted in the U.S. Army. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor that December, both Fury (somehow a buck sergeant already) and Hargrove happened to be on the scene. Fury's friend was killed, and with typical comic book motivation, Fury swore he would get back at the Axis.

During the summer of 1942, Fury was called to Great Britain to lead the formative First Attack Squad. He surely could not have realized at the time that the Howling Commandoes (a code name derived from their Gideonesque handling of their first mission) would become not only a crackerjack commando squad, but newsreel celebrities as well. Stan didn't fool around when he put this thing together!

Fury would, despite a court-martial trial and a few serious injuries (a couple near-fatal, another causing him to later lose his left eye, yet another leaving a bullet permanently in his leg), survive to re-enlist in the Korean War, where he was decorated a Second Lieutenant. Fury apparently

kept up with the U.S. government after that, for he surfaced next (FANTASTIC FOUR No. 21) as a Colonel for the CIA. Then, of course, came SHIELD (STRANGE TALES No. 135). Evidence suggests that two of the three ex-Howlers joining up with Fury at SHIELD (Jones and Dugan) also served with him in the CIA.

Jim Starlin and Howard Chaykin recently revealed a most startling fact about the seemingly ageless Fury--one of his near-mortal accidents in the Army during WWII placed him in the care of a doctor experimenting with a metabolic youth serum which Fury takes in injections periodically. Added to the complex log already created by Jim Steranko regarding Fury at SHIELD, any further revelations along those lines (hopefully by either or any of the gentlemen named above) would be fascinating as to the idea that Fury as a comics character had indeed grown old.

The rest of the group, in no particular order:

"Happy Sam" (The Old Man) Sawyer, the chosen commanding officer of the Howlers, made it from that 1940 Lieutenant to become a Captain by the time the Howlers were formed. In the interim, he had been transferred to an American ranger squadron, encountering once again Dum-Dum Dugan, now a U.S. Army Private. Together in the ranger squad, they spent about half a year fighting in North Africa. A Captain, apparently, all through World War II, Sawyer had made Colonel by Korea, and later (summer of 1967) was shown as a general working with the Pentagon.

Second-in-command of the Howlers was the muscular, easy-going Dum-Dum Dugan, christened Timothy Aloysius by his Irish parents. When the Howling Commandoes were first formed in 1942, Dugan was by then a corporal. On a stateside incident (FURY No.35), Dum-Dum suffered his first and only serious injury, being shot in the stomach, and was taken out of action for some time. An unsuccessful court-martial attempt occurred later on. Sometime after Korea, Dugan, along with ex-Howler Gabe Jones, was seen in SHIELD, and both were there at the 1967 Viet Nam covert action.

Gabe Jones, a black comics character long before Civil Rights, led a somewhat uneventful Howlers career, though his stint with SHIELD was considerably hotter. Technically, he was their bugler, but in the Howlers' systematic fighting style, he was certainly much more.

As a psychological study, an interesting point can be brought up regarding Gabe's fiancee in 1967's Christmas regrouping (ANNUAL No. 4), Carla Swain. The two had met in SGT. FURY No. 56 (circa very early 1944), and were in '67 as yet only engaged. 24 years? One answer may be that Carla had been a songstress during the war, and it is likely she would have been married and divorced at least once before--that's show biz! Perhaps Gabe also got hitched once before, so if Steve Englehart ever takes up the Howlers' or SHIELD's reins, look out for the story of Gabe Jones' lost wife--

Like Gabe, Robert "Rebel" Ralston's time with the Howlers was unmarred by any greater discomfort than usual. A demolitions expert, Rebel went on to become (after the Korean skirmish) a U.S. congressman. He was, however, near-mortally shot in the head at a present-day banquet (early '70's) commemorating the 100th issue of FURY. (If you recall, Stan contends all the stuff we see in the books really happened, and that the Bullpenners are really raconteurs.)

Dino Manelli, a Dean Martin take-off, was not as fortunate as either Gabe or Reb. Not only was he injured seriously on at least two occasions and tried for desertion once, but discovered a woman he once loved was a Nazi spy. A war-time linguist, Dino got both married and his own TV program after the war, fought with the rest in Korea and Viet Nam, and yes, a Jerry Lewis character did appear in the Howlers' saga, in No. 63's tragic "To Die with Honor."

Izzy Cohen was decidedly Jewish, one unusual point in the day and age in which FURY debuted. It is assumeable that his religion made it rough on him fighting the Nazis (and besides, did they have kosher C-rations?), most evident, however, when he was captured in No.49 and spent 10 issues in a Pacific theatre POW camp (a situation most poignantly observed in No.54--"Izzy Shoots the Works.") After the Korean regrouping, the Howlers' master mechanic went on tb marriage and to his family's Brooklyn garage, from which occupation he was interrupted for the Viet Nam one-shot. Outside of a passing reference of Dino's having a daughter, Izzy was seemingly the only ex-Howler to be shown as having children. Finally, the same issue in which Reb was shot saw Izzy hospitalized as well by a car accident. Apparently, both survived, though it would make an interesting comics sidelight if they had not.

Jonathan "Junior" Juniper was an Ivy League graduate, probably the only one of all the Howlers. Before being picked for the First Attack Squad, he had already been a successful tail-gunner on a B-17. He was shot and killed in an early mission.

Junior's replacement, Percival Pinkerton, came along in FURY No. 9. Armed with his trusty brolly, the English Howler added color and style to the group, and went on to assume a Hugh Hefner role in later life. He was also around for the Korean and Vietnamese battles.

There were a few others later on, of course, four to be precise. Of them, Jerry Larkin would be killed in action in No. 63; Duane Wilson would be shot for desertion in No. 75; and Fred Jones, in No. 81, would become a crippled amputee. Only one, Eric Koenig, really survived.

Koenig, a one-time character introduced in the Lee/Ayers No. 27, was brought back to join the Howlers, first as a special operative (being a defected Nazi) and later as a member, all under Roy Thomas' aegis. The German Eric became not only a valuable asset to the Howling Commandoes as a fighter pilot, but to the U.S. Army Intelligence as a counter-spy. His lack of appearance at the earlier-produced yet chronologically later D-Day and Korean episodes was explained by the fact that he would occasionally fly for the Army and Air Force. By 1967, Eric had become a commercial pilot for West German Air Lines, and later on, in an issue of CAPTAIN AMERICA by Englehart, emerged as a pilot for SHIELD.

Supporting characters included Fury's loud-mouthed (though certainly multi-faceted) foil, Bull McGiveney; and the only woman Fury ever loved during the war enough to want to marry, the tragically killed Army nurse, Pamela Hawley.

Fury's characters were varied and diverse, as well as being damn interesting people. As Dick Ayers puts it, "Each character had a definite personality and was so strong that a book would hold up with any one of them as its main hero." On various experimentalist occasions, readers found this to be true.

Dick Ayers undoubtedly handled the overwhelming majority of SGT. FURY's art, making his work fully a part of the most legendary and long-lasting Marvel Age art assignments: The Kirby FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR, the Heck and later John Buscema AVENGERS, the Ditko and Romita SPIDER-MAN, and the Colan DAREDEVIL. With nary a break at all, Dick Ayers pencilled 95 full length and annual-sized Fury stories, many of them classics of the genre. John Tartaglione and the incredible John Severin did the bulk of the inking.

Like the rest of the Marvel productions, the widely used Marvel method of writing the books after the art was completed was employed. The scripters for the SGT. FURY series would supply Dick Ayers with a brief synopsis, usually over the phone. Dick would basically plot and plan the stories, illustrating the tales in pencil, with notes in the margin to keep the scripter abreast of what was happening. The writer would then add dialogue and captions to conform. As Ayers recalls:

"I don't remember any story as being difficult. I enjoyed the characters in FURY and had most of the reference I needed. 'The Battle of the Bulge' was a very particular favorite for me... I was there, and doing the book brought back memories."

Dick Ayers'style would vary widely with his inkers. Though his figure's anatomy and movements were sometimes stiff and oddly defined, and though Ayers himself was dependent on a good inker to see his work through (still is, as a matter of fact; his work at National with Gerry Talaoc is caricaturishly well done, though his own inks for that same company are rather amateurish and rushed-looking), he was in

FURY a clear, forthright storyteller, excellent in medium close shots with a subtly out-of-focus background. He blended large panels with thin or small ones for movement, and often provided vast, cinemascopic panoramas for his writers to work with (maybe a residual item left over from the vast amounts of Kirby pencils he had inked). Perhaps, in fact, movement and action are the key words to describe Ayers' style, for even in a scene that would ordinarily be static, you could feel his characters breathing. John Tartaglione would add deceptively light inks that put folds and creases into all the characters' clothing, deep lines of reflection to their faces. Frank Giacoia would give the pencils a sharp, almost photographic quality. Vince Colletta, Steve Ditko, Carl Hubbell, Jim Mooney, Chic Stone, and the late Syd Shores would all ink FURY over Ayers eventually.

It was John Severin, however, that took the art even further, laying dark scratchy inks that made the pencils into stereo. With Severin's touch, the gory brutality of war was brought to a dimension only rarely seen in a work of comic art, easily on the level of Joe Kubert's fine work (and when you add writer Gary Friedrich--but we'll get to that). The Ayers/Severin team gave us an uncompromising portrayal of war as they themselves had lived through it, and anyone wishing to see a prime example of their collaboration need only examine ANNUAL No. 4's "The Battle of the Bulge" for some of the finest illustrations ever to grace a comic book.

"I liked the results of John Severin's work on SGT. FURY immensely," Ayers told us. "He added details beyond what I'd put in. He always seemed to go one step beyond."

The Howlers' story began as do most war comics, with a few varied tales in the first three issues that offered little more than Fury and his co-horts being sent to Germany to destroy something, then after a series of exaggerated fighting sequences and admittedly hilarious wise-cracking, the Howlers returning home. Pretty mild stuff, but it was still early. These groundwork issues were necessary to introduce the characterizations, to allow the readers some familiarity. It came as a surprise, then, that in the fourth issue a Howler–Junior Juniper--was killed. True, he had been played down for some issues before, but it was a great dramatic touch for a simple comic book regardless.

That fourth issue, and a few afterward, featured Jack Kirby inked by George Roussos (as George Bell). Roussos, who had inked Kirby's FF (and would later do a vastly deteriorated job on Larry Lieber's RAWHIDE KID pencils) in this case made the dark, no-nonsense Kirby beginnings erupt into a sheer plethora of sharp-edged, square-jawed roughness, allowing scripter Lee to burst open, to unleash, now, tales of tragic British aristocracies, about-to-be-converted bigots, and valor on the side of the enemy.

Dick Ayers took over the pencilling with No. 8, and Lee went on to give his readers a view of war they had not expected. Under Marvel's stand in those days that war has "all the glory of a stinkin' swamp," Lee recounted war's madness, its senseless orchestration of death. Refugee orphans, German civilians, and regular Army c.o.'s began to interact with the Howlers; lines of destiny crossed upon each other for the briefest of moments. Not just once were the Howlers saved by valorous underground agents whose names they never knew.

Roy Thomas' command of the scripting with No. 29 brought with him a kind of sophistication to the book, and Thomas showed just how expertly he could take a group comic and write it with flair. Sub-plots and surprises abounded, characterization reached a high. The story of the Howlers' origin was told. Eric Koenig was reintroduced. A tightly woven epic was compressed into the thirteen issues done by Thomas and company. It was an interesting time, for it represented the fact that Marvel was growing up, that it would take more than a mere handful of Lee-supervised craftsmen to keep up with sales and reader demand. The days of Lee/Kirby/Ayers doing all were passing away quickly. Dick Ayers recalled that:

"Stan Lee left FURY first to Roy Thomas because the super-heroes were gaining in popularity at that time, and it was best he concentrate on them. Roy later turned the assignment over to Gary Friedrich. I must admit I resented somewhat those super-heroes taking Stan away from FURY!"

In any case, all that happened before would become just a prelude to the coming of one of the field's great talents in his day, a writer named Gary Friedrich.

Friedrich, surely the most prominent of FURY's scripters, was born August 21, 1943 in Jackson, Missouri (that being interesting in light of Gary's later introduction of FURY a squadron called the Missouri Marauders). A boyhood friend of Roy Thomas, and one-time managing editor of a small Midwestern newspaper, Friedrich entered comics in January, 1966, and did free-lance romance scripts for a few months. His first major job at Marvel was a Western short in TWO-GUN KID No. 86 (3/67). As Gary later recalled in ANNUAL No. 3's biography featurette, "...I must have been wearing my six-guns straight when I wrote it, for this lead to my current staff status as assistant editor at Marvel, as well as scripter for SGT. FURY and THE GHOST RIDER." Aside from minor free-lancers on Westerns and such, Friedrich was one of the very first new writers of the '60's Marvel Age (the only two preceeding being Roy Thomas and Jim Steranko).

Friedrich jumped right on in with SGT. FURY, knocking off a 43-page annual very early in his career. Working closely with artist Dick Ayers (and soon afterward for three issues with John Severin pencilling), Friedrich began his portion of the Howlers epic slowly, gradually, allowing the gears and pistons in his creative motor to warm up to top performance. His first couple of issues were well-written, showed definite promise, and featured Friedrich's fine hand at creating good dialogue. The stories were nothing very deep or controversial, you understand, just Gary getting used to the characters.

Suddenly, it happened. Dropped like a bombshell amidst the fires of U.S. involvement in Viet Nam, SGT. FURY No. 45 took a firm moralistic stand for the rest of the series by premiering what would become one of the most acclaimed collections of stories in comic books: The Gary Friedrich "The" series, debuting with "The War Lover.". Anthological in nature, with Fury and company playing Camus' Stranger or Eisner's occasionally all-observing Spirit, Friedrich's "The" series hit a good start. "The War Lover" chronicalled the attitudes, values, and beliefs of Paul Ryan, a General's son who lived only to kill "the enemy," a man who was stripped of his humanity by the insanity of war--and felt able to rationalize himself.

Future stories in that fashion--all but one written by Friedrich--would center on what war could do to "The Assassin" (No. 51), the tragedy of a man turned hired liquidator in wartime Germany, his family held as blackmail by Hitler's Gestapo; "The Informer" (No. 57), an observation on loyalty and trust, staged in a German POW camp; "The Peacemonger" (No. 64), a pathos-filled testament to man's--and woman's --selective perceptions; "The Deserter" (No. 75), an allusion to the real-life execution of Private Eddie Slovik; "The All-American" (No. 81), Al Kurzrok's tale of a man divorced between the twin microcosms of sport and war; and ultimately, "The Reporter" (No. 110), an account of a journalist faced with the most horrible question of all--when might a human life be forfeit? Many feel, also, that No. 46's tale, "They Also Serve," should be included in FURY's "The" annals, for that story might as easily have been called "The Medic." It presented, needless to say, a painfully well-written portrait of one type of man's most unusual valor.

Throughout Gary Friedrich's run, FURY held up a superlative pop-cultural quality that even today is hard to match. Stories like "When Two Worlds Collide" would throw you into the midst of hell-slogging warfare, while "On the Sidewalks of New York" would tell you all about Fury's family, and leave you laughing--right up to that first shock as Fury's ethics run head-on with his pacifistic younger brother's. "Tea and Sabotage" offered the readers a taste of mystery and intrigue; "With a Little Help From My Friends" had Gary and Dick pioneering

some of today's storytelling techniques–check it out; and no one could read the cinematic "The Deserter" without choking in bitterness at the end. There are countless examples; everyone seems to have a favorite.

Though there were only three major scripters in SGT. FURY's span, others would sometimes step in to meet deadlines or get a synopsis in to Ayers when Friedrich was late and Dick found himself idle. Included are such notables as Archie Goodwin, Arnold Drake, Bill Everett, and Gerry Conway. Sometime-letterer Al Kurzrok, who would later bid Marvel adieu and head off for Haiti, was chief pinch-scripter. Nearly all the stories, incidentally, were co-plotted by Ayers, and in the Friedrich/Ayers/Severin days, the final product would be a perfectly harmonized effort among the three. And aside from Ayers, there were but four other artists in those circa-100 issues--Kirby's first few as well as No. 13; Severin's No.'s 44-46, and one story each by Tom Sutton ("Done," said Ayers, "the time I asked for a furlough and reassignment!") and Herb Trimpe ("They shuffled Trimpe and me around, he to FURY and myself and Severin to HULK. Two HULK's I did were meant to be a giant-size. but the project was shelved and the story turned into two or three issues.").

In comic books, good things most definitely do not last forever. Fill-in writers dominated throughout most of 1971 and 1972, and beginning with FURY No. 80, every other issue of the monthly book sported a reprint. Things would never be the same again.

Later on, a sorely missed Gary Friedrich thankfully returned to the strip after a too-long hiatus, and even later, reprints were eliminated and FURY slowed to 7 issues a year, a move that should have occurred in the first place--but it was too little, and far, far too late. The attempts at carrying coherent storylines with reprints in-between proved too much for SGT. FURY, and Friedrich in particular began to spread his talent too thinly over too many other projects. His FURY scripting became sloppy, with only a few exceptions, and careless; Ayers' art was, in most instances, terribly under par and lacked good inkers. Gerry Conway signed on (No.s 117-119), but that was like sending in a specialist to see Francisco Franco. Because of script, character, and date inconsistencies in those final four stories, most fans refuse to acknowledge their existence in the SGT. FURY epic. Perhaps Gary Friedrich was being ironically prophetic when he titled his last stories (No.s 114-116), "The Breakdown of Sgt. Fury"; "This One's for Fury"; and "–The End of the Road." We mourned. Dick Ayers recalled that time with a sigh.

"I presume the slump at the end was an unconscious result of a resentment of the policy reprinting FURY every other issue. It didn't seem fair to the book, not to mention Gary and me. Fury was sure to lose his readers, and we realized it. I guess it affected our inspiration."

For Fury, it really was the end of the road. The tarnished gold of only yesterday became mingled with the pig iron and the dust. Whether pop culture history will look back at the SGT. FURY accomplishments with a sigh of pleasure or impatience, we cannot tell. But they were indeed damn good stories, and their passing leaves a void.

C. Russell
VOHLAND

"FEAR, SHADOW, NIGHT"

BY PETER B. GILLIS

There is a body lying on the ground. Its head has just rolled back. Another body stands above it, watching. Something is inevitably said. We then proceed to the actions of the second figure as he or she or it deals with what has just occured: a death. As we follow that figure, we can talk of violence, excessive or otherwise, morality, war, crime, DEATH WISH, Gary Gilmore, or what have you. It is an important thing to discuss, make no mistake, and is the subject of many dissertations and articles.

The books and thanatological studies are there, too.

But wait. Take a look again at the first figure, laid down, body chilling down to room temperature, unmoving. There is something more going on here than war, crime, morality, violence, something that we, as members of our Western Civilization find difficult to talk about, but which we, as members of the human race, have an intimate relation to. The human being is dead. Just as you will be, one day. Think about it, but not for too long.

How do we confront, in the comics, this night, this shadow, this fear, that death and the appearance of death brings to us? Let me begin talking about it by getting anecdotal for a moment:

I have read comics from very early on, so early that I don't remember with too much exactness what it was I read. They all seemed to flow into one another--Superman, Blackhawk, Justice League (this was pre-Marvel), until everything was awash in primary colors. There was one story, however, that stands out, burning in my mind so much that I remember the room I was in, every single detail about the reading of. No, I did not pick up an old EC by mistake, it was a Superman story, with a title like "Superman's Old Age" or something quite similar.

In this story, Superman finds that suddenly he has to ride around in a wheelchair. Everyone else has aged as well; Jimmy Olsen, the perenial cub reporter, has settled down into jowly middle age (something that Curt Swan does way too well), married, with kids, and so on. Everything was portrayed in the most depressing way possible, as if some grim disease had wracked the whole cast of characters--and then Superman woke up, and, thank God, it was only a dream!

I guess the writer thought that Supes' waking was suppose to cheer the readers up, but such was not the case: I realized, even at my tender age, that the horrible dream-world the Man of Steel had entered into and seemingly escaped from was nothing less than the real world, the world that I was and am living in. Maybe Superman did not have to be afraid of going down that diminishing road, but I knew that I was going to do so. Behind the image of a Jimmy Olsen dead from Old Age, I felt trapped in a world that was steadily narrowing down, driving me inexorably to the flat brick wall of death, and there is no escape, not in my world.

It was the beginning of a panicky fear of death that I carried with me most of my life, and that I still fear despite all the wisdom I've acquired in lo, these 24 years.

Maybe this is an extreme or neurotic example, but I really don't think so. The point I'm trying to make here is that pretending that something does not exist, or trying to avoid it, not only does not make that thing go away, but causes a great negative shadow to rise up in the background, a Lovecraftian horror that is nevertheless quite immediate and unavoidable. It is almost unnecessary to cite in addition the bogeyman that sex has become in the modern West (what horrible things must be located at the hidden ends of women's breasts? Something icky and slimy I'll bet).

(I'd like to interject for a moment. Pete's equation of death and sex has become more than a point researched. Advertisers of liquor, for example, utilize the research that lists death and sex, the two topics most in people's minds, and often utilize subliminal imagery for enticement--the two subjects are fascinating in similar ways--fsl.)

In any case, the fact is that there is simply no way of not talking about death, that the message comes across even through the silent void. The comics, in fact, speak to us about death, not through the great clamor of violence, but through more frightening silence.

You know the quote by Shakespeare: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances." Comics, with their imitation of the world, have sought to change that--there are a number of characters who never leave the stage. In this world/play, the stars never exit. The world of Superman, the world of Spider-Man, the world of Archie...they are all representations of a state where the play never ends, goes on forever as it has always done, and the principal players are always there to delight us.

This perpetual presence and constancy is a comforting part of their appeal. Whether it is the feather-light humor of Archie and Jughead, the blatant wish-fulfillment of Superman, or the sympathetic excitement of Spider-Man, the pleasure we get from asso-

ciating with these characters is made much greater by the awareness that this pleasure is not one that disappears as pleasures in the real world do, but are constant ones, ones that we can always come back to.

But wait, I hear some fellow Marvelites ask (actually I don't, since I'm all alone in my apartment, but the needs of rhetoric must be served), in Marvel comics things change, they develop, people come and go. It's like real life, isn't it?

I must respond: No, it is not. Marvel has developed a wonderful system of internal consistency, which saves it from much of the triviality that DC is often heir to, but on the other hand, the creators at Marvel continue to return old characters with such frequency that the feeling of godlike continuity is in fact reinforced at Marvel more than anywhere else. Not even the cheap little villains die! The whole thousand-plus cast of the Marvel Universe is made up of people who never really leave the stage: They wait around in the wings or in the background. And even if the actor is killed, as were the Green Goblin, the Mandarin, the Foolkiller, Baron Zemo, the Molecule Man, some understudy picks up his costume (which is what is really important in this visual medium) and resumes the playing of the part. No, the only people who die in Marvel Comics are the people who are created in order to be killed for dramatic effect.

There is, moreover, only one cause of death in the comics: Death by Writer's Decree. Oh, to a certain extent, that is true of all literature, if you take a cynical standpoint, but in comics it is utterly transparent. Take the recent death of Jarella (which, since Len Wein had previously thought of her only as The Hulk's Love Interest, is really no death at all; we are simply waiting for someone else to put on that THLI dress and take her place)--she dies by falling

under a collapsing wall. Now, that seems like a reasonable way to die; people do it all the time in the real world. But, on the other hand, how many thousands of times have Marvel characters been caught under a collapsing structure and survived? If the Red Skull were caught under a collapsing building, would he be killed? Quiz time kids: a) yes, b) no.

For all of you who answered b), my congrats, since you know how Marvel Comics works. You realize that the only reason that Jarella died was because Len Wein (writer/editor that he be) decreed that she die. Think of the universe that implies--that the only reason one has to die is that one ceases to be interesting. Everything that is good, that is stimulating, remains around forever. So look at the real world, then, and see how closely that corresponds to our life, and I think you'll realize how much of a desperate wish-fulfillment universe that is.

But, dammit, comics are an escapist medium, entertainment, right? They are supposed to be fantasy, aren't they? True, but neither fantasy nor entertainment are divorced from life. Our fantasy, our entertainment, are as much a part of our lives as what we call "reality," and while you can escape with perfect pleasure the absurdities and confusions of that "reality" for a fantasy-state where things are different, you've got to relate that state to your life. It's got to be a part of you as a whole. And since death and change are a part of everyone's life, even in fantasy or entertainment, you cannot ignore those aspects. You can dispose of them by inventing them, and especially death, away, by explaining them away --in Oz, nobody gets old or dies, because it's been openly legislated out of existence; on Heinlein's Mars, the Martians understand that death is a state like another country, sort of like Canada, and you

can't avoid dealing with death. If you do not deal with it, it will pop up anyway.

My main point about most of the comics that we read is this: Fundamentally, the comics present a world-view in which change is to be feared, that things passing away is just plain horrible, and that the ultimate change, namely death, is the ultimate fear. We want the world of Superman, we want the Marvel Universe to go on, with nothing ever being subtracted from it--the ultimate extension of absurity, I think, incidentally, is the war comics, for in these, the readers even want World War II to go on forever. Despite all the killing that occurs in these books, they are still purveyors of hero-worship, just like all the rest. Sgt. Rock and Sgt. Fury are constant, deathless characters. As long as we associate with them, nothing need ever change, we need not die.

The fantasy world portrayed here is a dangerous one to wish for; to wish that our earthly situation be prolonged forever must ultimately lead to the horror-filled realization that man must change, and that one of these changes must be death, whatever it might be. If a person cannot accept that, then no religious belief, no salvation can help, since the necessity of change is woven into every religion and philosophy since the world began.

Stories in the comics must be written about death, and about change. I'm not suggesting that Marvel kill off Spider-Man, or DC destroy Superman, although such moves would cause a maturing shock in a lot of people who depend on comics for their fantasy life. What I am suggesting, hoping, is that the stories, the legends of the comics, become part not of constantly unchanging stability, but of change, evolution, growth. Characters should be able to put things behind them, they should put off old parts of their existence as they become different, older people. Stan Lee understood that with Spider-Man in the early days. Peter Parker did graduate from high school, he did fall out of love with Betty Brant. He moved away from home. However, with the single exception of Gwen Stacy's death, nothing has changed since then--Gerry Conway even brought Liz Allen back, Jim Starlin did change Captain Marvel, Warlock, and even Nick Fury irrevocably, and Steve Englehart seemed on the verge of forever changing Dr. Strange, until Marv Wolfman blithely changed him back. They changed them not by revamping their costumes or giving them new love interests, but by making them change and grow. Don McGregor did the same thing with the Black Panther, but that was also discarded. (That's no denigration of Jack Kirby: THE ETERNALS is a comic book devoted to change, and 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY is a comic whose very essence is a change that is very close to death.)

There is hope, I think. But the function of comics should never be to make us fear life. To do so is evil, far more evil than an excess of violence or obscenity plastered over the pages of the comics. If comics grow in the same way that people grow, that need never happen. Unfortunately, that growing does not occur often enough.

& HAZLEWOOD

ONE MORE ARTICLE ON

HOWARD THE DUCK

BY GENE KEHOE

Okay, picture this assortment of characters--a vampire cow, a horny turnip, a cosmic accountant, a homicidal cookie, a paranoid kidney lady, and an 80-year-old beaver. They might be contestants on The Gong Show. Then again, they might be characters torn from the Steve Gerber world of HOWARD THE DUCK.

You remember Howard, don't you? He's making all the headlines--why, we're STARS again! Why, look! Up in the sky! It is a bird, ma! Yes, Howard the Duck, faster than a speeding bullfrog, more powerful than a loco Mormon, able to leap tall buildings when the wind's right; who, with beauteous Beverly Switzler at his side, fights a seemingly hopeless battle for Truth, Justice, and the Aquatic Way.

Fine. We know all that. Tell us something new. If it's not new, we don't want to hear it.

Well, why not, kiddies?

Because it's all been said before. We've looked behind the scenes from a dozen different angles.

That's probably true. But let's put all the pieces together into one quilt, shall we? It's warmer that way.

It's been said that the saga of Howard the Duck is replete with controversy. Right off the beak, Frank Brunner missed the art deadline on the first Howard story, forcing it to be pushed back from GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING No.3 to No.4. Then came the infamous HOWARD THE DUCK No.1. Comic dealers across the nation hoarded copies to artificially inflate its value, a plot that has worked as HOWARD No.1 will probably be listed at around $7.50 in this year's OVERPRICED STREET GUIDE, or whatever the thing's called. Issue No.2 had problems with the Comics Code's whining about double-entendre and what-not, plus Frank Brunner quit after drawing this issue, complaining that author Steve Gerber did not allow him to co-plot No.2 as he had done previously. Brunner also indicated that the direction Gerber wanted to take the strip was too pedestrian for his tastes--just the average duck on the street, right?

Next came HOWARD No.3, a brilliant satire condemning our society's preoccupation with and glorification of violence.

Figures, doesn't it, that this outstanding achievement in comic art, one worthy of the only Stan Lee letter in the LOC's of Marvel, may be responsible for the trend towards simplicity and mindlessness at Marvel today. It was this comic that brought to a head the feeling among a few Marvel editors that their comics were becoming too grim, too realistic. As a result, sophisticated storytellers like Don McGregor, Steve Englehart, and Jim Starlin were driven out (with Gerber and Doug Moench next in line), and childish new titles like NOVA and GODZILLA were begun. As things stand now, HOWARD THE DUCK may be the last hope for fans who prefer an adult slant to their comic literature.

There was one other bit of controversy, incidentally, on the book, as Gerber almost left Marvel due to a dispute over the naming of his parody of Rev. Sun Young Moon in issue No.6. Gerber wanted to call him Sun Moon Dung, and Marvel would not allow the name. The name Joon Moon Yuc was finally settled upon, and Gerber was allowed to use the character.

Howard's personality deserves a look. I see Howard as a kind of Gore Vidal or H. L. Mencken in a duck suit, in that he is individualistic, sarcastic,

cynical, pragmatic, and uncompromising of principle. Gerber might be considered a Camus-figure, but he has made his duck no stranger to us--we know Howard well, and intimately. We've seen the allegorical decay of modern society through Howard's eyes and experiences, perhaps with the ghost of T.S. Eliot. whispering in his ear.

The pressures of being an individual thinker constantly struggling for survival in a conformist society may have driven Howard crazy. Given his personality, his mental breakdown in No.10 is a logical step. It was handled, perhaps necessarily, in a humorless, almost depressing manner, and the crux of the matter is that this type of story could kill the comic. Howard's success is a tenuous one, as it does not rely on the proven Marvel formula for success--violent action and super-hero vs. super-villain. Instead, HOWARD relies on being funny and satirical, and this is what readers expect when they pick up a copy. If they don't have this expectation fulfilled, many might very well stop buying the book.

At first, everyone read HOWARD because it was the thing to do, a fad of sorts. But fads die out, and in order to keep readers coming back the book must keep them laughing, must rule their minds with an iron hand. Gerber can be as philosophical and introspective as he wants, just so long as he does not forget the jokes. "C'mon, clown, make us laugh!" seems the mentality. "and don't forget the tears at the end. Fantastic! Gerber's another PAGLIACCI!" and they wish the comedy to never finish.

What does the future hold for Howard?

Survival, hopefully.

Oh, was that answer too morbid? Gee, kiddies, I'm sorry. I thought you were all aware of Marvel's latest editorial policies. Well, shucks, kids, if you want to laugh about Howard's future, how about suggesting that Howard run into Rufus T. Hackstabber, Marvel's version of Groucho Marx so that DUCK SOUP would be given new meaning? Or, Howard could run into a ruthless, fiendish comic book dealer as a good antagonist...Howie Duck meets Howie Rogofsky, maybe. Or how about... but maybe I'm belaboring the point. A tribute of some kind to Carl Barks would, however, be justified; after all, Carl has stated that he loves the Howard concept. The best possibility would be a tribute to the late, lamented Walt Kelly. Kelly's approach to funny animals/social satire in "Pogo" has much more in common with Howard than do Bark's duck books. Howard could venture into the Okefenokee Swamp and meet a whole world of talking analogies. Through these anthropomorphic critters and critics, Steve Gerber, Gene Colan, and Steve Leialoha could do a marvelous parody of some of the more infamous personalities at Marvel and DC.

But then, we'd be getting serious, wouldn't we?

MARTIAL LAW

BY CHRIS NEGRI

It is very disturbing to have people make statements regarding the martial arts without realizing their mistaken impression of the true state of affairs.

Karate, as founded, is a highly-disciplined art form with very important philosophical aspects. It is designed to teach one mastery over himself, to build character and spiritual strength, as well as training the body. This is accomplished by the most exacting conditions regarding instruction. Martial arts is an extremely delicate and serious affair.

Comics, as a medium, propogate the same inaccuracies and misconceptions concerning the martial arts that television, the cinema, and some contemporary literature have. The reason is a need for mass appeal to a commercial audience, the antecedent conditions of which will be outlined shortly.

Okay, you might say, so some things are wrong. What of it? We're only dealing with kiddie books.

If you really believed that, you would not be reading any analyses of what comics as a powerful and wide-spread medium can do. My contention is simply that (A) these inaccuracies could be avoided with very little effort; the martial arts are (B) actually more entertaining in their realistic forms; and the inaccuracies (C) are contributing to misconceptions concerning oriental culture and martial arts, and limiting their appeal to those who are concerned with superficiality, stereotypes, and, in general, the LOWER aspects of very noble arts.

The earliest comic book dealing with martial arts was possibly Charlton's magazine JUDOMASTER, which I enthusiastically followed. The title character (pictured here somewhere with thanks to Frank McLaughlin) used authentic techniques in dealing with his adversaries, techniques executed in correct form. Realistic in most details, the series also ran a short section on little-known aspects of judo and karate which were informative in nature. Well-researched and clearly explained (no easy trick when trying to inform a foreign public on ancient, in-depth practices), it remains clearly one of the best representations of martial arts in comic literature.

After the demise of the JUDOMASTER strip there was nothing left of serious martial arts in comic fiction--only stereotypes shamelessly embedded into impressionable minds, with precious few exceptions.

The situation has not changed. With the advent of the "kung-fu craze" came a general lack of authenticity. The series of Bruce Lee films and his cheapie, low-grade Hong Kong counterparts managed to bring to the public precisely the wrong representation of their respective arts. Listen before you get steamed up--Fighting in the most illogical ways for the most improper reasons, the protagonists of these films succeeded in attracting violence-hungry throngs to the theaters and dojo alike, and brainwashing them in to thinking that their commercial image of martial arts was what martial arts were really all about.

While half the public believed the ideal martial artist was a stoic, proverb spouting Kwai Chang Caine figure and the other half venerated the squealing, leaping Bruce Lee types, Marvel Comics jumped on the bandwagon and gave the public a combination of both--SHANGI-CHI, MASTER OF KUNG FU. A tie-in to the Fu Manchu saga, this strip necessarily includes the "battle against 100 opponents" type of scene made popular by the Hong Kong flicks. The books good plots and excellent artwork, however, luckily soften the misfired effects.

(Since the writing of this article, Shang-Chi has gone into a secret agent phase, with both plot, artwork, and dialogue transcending the earlier occurrances--fsl.)

What is my beef on Shang-Chi, then? Even though imbued with moral conscience and positive qualities, the character of Shang-Chi is used in implausible circumstances and convinces the reader that they are realistic. The dialogue of the minor oriental characters is stilted, with Marvel's usual overdramatization. "Prepare to die, dog-son of Fu Manchu!" for example. Nobody talks like that. And nobody, NOBODY shouts "HAI-YA!" in a fight--or at any time. It is interesting to see the same kind of dialogue, for an anology, that was laughable in the BATMAN television show being lapped up by the supposedly intelligent readers of MASTER OF KUNG FU.

On the other hand, some very clever and realistic dialogue was used in the first issue of National's comic, RICHARD DRAGON, KUNG FU FIGHTER. In the opening scenes, where Dragon meets his teacher in Japan, the scenery was right, the characterization perfect, and the atmosphere proper--a key word in all this, PROPER--and the physical techniques were precise and authentic. A little realism at last. Also, a fantastic strip called WRONG COUNTRY was done but never published in newsstand form. I read it in the CHARLTON BULLSEYE and I heartily recommend it to all fans. For the first time, Korean tae-kwon-do is given coverage in an extremely authentic, accurate, and intellectual approach with very good art by Sanho Kim. It is ironic that the most frequently (commercially) exploited art should have this most tastefully done fiction. The strip is intelligently done and a fine example of a project by someone who is so obviously into his subject. It is the finest example of what a martial art strip should be like and the best effort to date. As a practitioner, I was very impressed by the values stated and the good techniques shown.

You might be inclined to suggest here that none of

FRANK McLAUGHLIN
P. NEVILLE '91 DE LA ROSA

the accurately done strips have sold well or at all. The danger here is in automatically establishing a dichotomy. According to a Marvel Comics source, MASTER OF KUNG FU is among Marvel's poorest-selling books. Degree of accuracy is not a necessary determinant of sales response.

Then there are the physical techniques employed by the people between the pages of MASTER OF KUNG FU and more so in its spin-off strips (IRON FIST, SONS OF THE TIGER). The techniques are, at best, unorthodox, and often ridiculous. A few examples of care and detail emerge from time to time but the majority are not authentic or realistic. This improved somewhat in the case of IRON FIST, due to the strong inks of Frank (JUDOMASTER) McLaughlin; but while the iron fist training is very much a real practice, and the character's movements not too outlandish, punching out subway trains, as the character was made to do, is a definite NO.

Historical accuracy is confused and contrived. In addition to the wearing of pseudo-Japanese clothing, Chinese characters are constantly brandishing Okinawan field weapons, as well as some which do not exist but in the imagination of the artist. This would be fine, given that these are indeed comics and a visual medium, except that China has her own weapons which are more exotic and fanciful than any of the

Okinawan variety, and which certainly have more potential visual appeal for a comics audience. China's clothing and language are also products of a great culture which does not need to be butchered in a magazine supposedly showcasing a Chinese art. It would take a very minimal amount of research to portray these things correctly.

Another reoccurring mistake is the inclusion of villains who are supposedly ninja. Now, the ninja were very real; however, due to their comic book popularity we cannot say the writers researched this subject deeply. The ninja are being linked (once again) with China, which never had ninja, and are being clothed in costumes of every style and color except what they wore.

Clumsy attempts at Chinese calligraphy surrounding panels of a fight scene are trite and embarrassing. More so the actual use of such terms as "dragon's head punch" or "monkey blow" in conjunction with a John Wayne-style haymaker--more flimsy attempts at authenticity. And there is that god-forsaken shrine gong that is constantly thrown in the background to make everything "look oriental"! A gong does not belong on a torii and the yin-yang symbol certainly does not belong on a gong. The frequency, also, with which the ancient Taoist symbol of yin-yang appears, and the very, very superficial understanding (and, hence, irreverence) of it amounts to nothing less than sacrilege of a symbol revered in Eastern culture no less so--and possibly more so--than the cross or crucifix is in the West.

Finally, a recent cover which assulted my eyes, depicting a man clad in a karate gi spearing a bloody, fallen opponent (aforementioned gong in the background), is unforgiveably disgusting. In similar taste, one might conceive a cover photo of a Chinese girl spreading her legs at the reader--with a yin-yang sign on her crotch, naturally. Must be authentic!

RIC CRUZ/S.DELAROSA

A COMIC WRITER'S FAN CLUB

BY DEAN MULLANEY

When most comic book fans talk about comics in general, they speak of comicart. Think about the times you have tried to convince someone that comics are indeed good and do contain aesthetically pleasing elements. What have you done? Shown them a Neal Adams page? A Wrightson? A Kane, Kubert, Brunner page? Probably. And each time what did the person reply? "Yeah, that artwork is ni-ice!" Right. The artwork is nice--not the comic book, but the artwork.

Well, a comic book is not simply artwork. The medium is one of duality, in which the visuals and the narrative themes work together, each realizing the other to hopefully produce the ultimate and best communicative channel.

There is something very disturbing, however, about a medium in which its supporters treat the artist with the reverance of a god, while the writer must take the supporting role of priest. Admittedly, comics is a visual medium, and as such there is a marked accent on the artwork. But so is the cinema, and few cinematographers work without the aid of a competent screenwriter. In comics, a stage for the communication of ideas, the concept and the basic thematic essence of a character or situation demands weightier consideration. This is not the general case with comics: Not unlike the pitcher in baseball, the comic book artist is considered to be 90% of the whole works.

When a top artist leaves a title, the woes are cried throughout fankind; when a writer leaves or is chucked off a book, the resultant reverberations are relatively minor. Many fans will go out and buy a comic solely for the artwork (SWAMP THING being being one example), yet writers, for the most part, do not have this immense following--at least not in the aspect of an insured pre-sold market for a new title. One sees artist checklists in zines all the time, but how about a writer checklist?

Why is it that writers are cast as extras on the comic book stage? Is it because the majority of comic book fans are inane assholes who do not understand the importance of strong theme, strong plot and characterization? Does it relate back to the writers themselves? Is it the quality (or lack of) of the writers' work the reason for the fans' infatuation with the comic artists?

Let us take a look at the basic setup of the comic book medium. One aspect to consider is that the number of writers are relatively few in comparison to the number of artists. This is the result of the editorial contention that the artwork is more important to the books than is the story. Conceptual formularization is acceptable if the formula sells. Once that successful formula is found, writers who can churn out the same stories over and over again are a dime a dozen (and not even a dozen are needed!) In the case of current comics, the Formula has been found and the only writers kept on staff are those who can produce within the limits of that formula. If one refuses to bow down, out you go. The writer is, therefore, andicapped
handicapped editorial meddling.

Comics are also periodicals. They call for time limits to creative thought. While an artist can demand to handle one or two books a month (because of higher rates), a writer to survive must write a hell of a lot of books to put some Milky Ways in the freezer. And in a world of realists (not to mention those idealists who like to eat!), turning in hackneyed plots and scripts is almost understandable.

Almost, but not quite.

Face it--because of the demands put on them by the medium, plus their own decisions to adhere to the medium's guidelines, comic book writers do not usually produce work which deserves great and lasting recognition. It is not their fault, and yet it is.

Oddly enough, there are a few comic book writers --less than a handful, mind you--that have gathered

fan following in the same way comic artists have. But they are few.

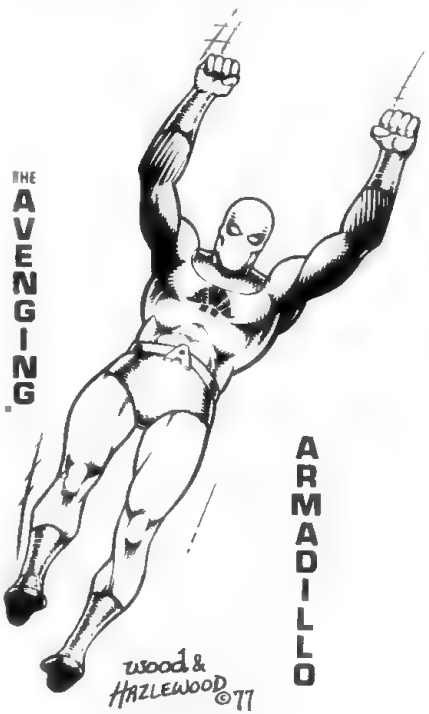
Think of the times a writer left, or was taken off a book. Now, think of the number of times, of all those, that there was an outcry from even a portion of fankind. The percentage is small, very small. But there are some writers who do have fan followings, ones which will treat them with the same respect most fans reserve for comic artists. When Steve Englehart was replaced by Kirby on CAPTAIN AMERICA, there was a protest, one still debated to this moment. When Steve Gerber was taken off the DEFENDERS and the Guardians of the Galaxy strip in MARVEL PRESENTS, there was an outcry from those who learned of the reasoning why. When Doug Moench had a number of his charges cancelled or grabbed, and in place given things like GODZILLA, some felt chagrin. When Don McGregor was literally thrown off LUKE CAGE, AMAZING ADVENTURES and JUNGLE ACTION, there was an outpouring of fan support.

Interestingly, in a medium dominated by artists, these few writers have emerged as something different, something special. Englehart fans followed him to DC; McGregor fans followed him to LUKE CAGE. When such writers are relieved of their respective titles, there are reactions. One does not hear complaints when Len Wein changes one book for another, or Marv Wolfman shuffles books like Lloyd Lynne did a deck of cards. There is not much of a murmur, if one at all. Yet with these other writers, there is.

Why?

That's not too difficult a question to answer. It is because the McGregor's and Engleharts, the Gerbers, etc., have yielded quantity for quality. They are hopeless idealists all. Preferring to write books that are different from the norm, they have served the appetizers to intellectually starving fans. Preferring to create characters and concepts that are naturalistic, they have broken from the Formula. And in doing so, they have not only gained the respect of those fans who look beyond the stale Formula, but have also gained the ire of the Powers That Be in comics. Bucking the Formula, they are getting lost in the general house-cleaning being perpetrated by the major companies. With the control over comic stories today very tight, there is no room at either major company for experiments in good taste. (Bravo, Dean!--fsl) National has its line of middle-men editors, and Marvel its policy of screening all ideas in advance. With so much editorial interference, the creative juices somewhat evaporate.

Comics are losing their major source of difference, of depth. Without much in the way of strong conceptual themes and characters, comics turn into pretty picture books--and pretty picture books can be found in many places other than comics, and often with prettier pictures. Comics need more than simply pretty pictures to develop their occasionally surfacing (commercial) potential--hack work need not be the exclusive product on the market. Comics need the available sources of new and viable alternatives to the Formula. Comics need those writers that buck the Formula, those writers that have, indeed, gained their own...fan clubs.



PAUL KUPPERBURG

"WAR AND ANTI-WAR, THAT IS THE QUESTION...."

To begin with, violence hurts, so it just is not worth the trouble–but that is the logical way of looking at things. Personally, I do not know if my feelings concerning violence are logical or not, but they are my feelings, and tempered by a semi-insider's viewpoint. Myself, I am totally anti-violence–I do not believe in the stuff (that's 50% cowardice and 50% morality speaking, folks). Violence just is not right. Had the "war" in Viet Nam continued a year or two longer, I would have informed my friendly neighborhood draft board of the fact–and had they not believed me, you would currently be addressing my mail in care of General Delivery, Montreal, Canada. But that is neither here nor there.

I do not read war novels, watch war movies, or particularly like war comics, with a few exceptions. I refuse to write war stories for comics unless, of course, I come up with a really strong anti-war story. Ah, but come to think of it, Archie Goodwin said it about ten years ago better than I ever could in BLAZING COMBAT. But, I wonder.

Violence and war, as presented in comics, are done in with similar motivations, and are things that cannot be done without in comic books. I thought about a series of comics without violence, and envisioned racks filled solely with Archie and love comics–Yuk!–maybe violence is not so bad. I mean, I like a really good Clint Eastwood flick, and that baffles me. (Many feel that the words "good" and "Clint Eastwood" are mutually exclusive, but I beg to differ. For some strange reason I really dig the action, chills, and thrills–remember the scene in the football stadium in DIRTY HARRY, huh, huh, do ya? So call me a hypocrite!)

Okay, on to funny books.

There have been charges for several years that various mediums of mass communication are harbingers of violence in the minds of young Americans. The cinema, television, comics–all have had a turn as scapegoat. I've been in comics (fandom and otherwise) since February, 1971, in the space of which I've attended about twenty major conventions in 3 states, met/known literally thousands of fans, and guess what? There's nary a homicidal maniac or sexual deviant in the lot! (Well, maybe one or two who had a thing for sheep...) (Only kidding, folks, only kidding!)

So when violence/war in comics gets down to the bottom line, you get this: There are a lot of disturbed people in this world who will find fault in virtually anything, no matter what, and so follows censorship, ala the movie rating code, Family Viewing Time on TV, etc. I am vehemently against censorship. I am vehemently against directors like Sam Peckinpah and comics like COMBAT KELLY AND HIS SADO-MASOCHISTIC MONSTERS also, but what can you do? You get either violence or censorship; to me, violence is the lesser of the two evils here. It is a shitty choice. Yet, why does a situation like this exist? Perhaps an example could illustrate:

Several months ago, there was a fine semi-documentary TV-movie called BORN INNOCENT which was about a teenage girl who was sent to prison. One scene in this film had the girl, played by Linda Blair, raped with a broomstick by her fellow female prisoners. The following week, at Eerasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, one of the female students was raped with a broomstick by her fellow students. That should read, "animals," rather, animals who cannot be trusted to view or read a realistic drama because it gives their miniscule minds ideas of that sort. Art emulates like, and sadly, in this case and others similar to it, vice versa.

Those who scream for censorship are running scared, then, always afraid of what the omnipresent "other guy" might do–and so perpetrate the social myths which engulf certain personality types in their own warped views of what they feel society expects of them, in this case violence. But how does this relate to the comics?

By their very nature, as I have said, comics depend heavily on violence. Sure, you can get away from it on occasion (one of my later stories for Charlton has the protagonist turn into a frog at the end, instead of the cliche killing–but then, I have this wart fetish...). However, I do not find these types of stories that bad. For the most part, they deal with the unrealistic idea of the supernatural; fantasy violence. It is a cheap thrills bit on the same level as Hitchcock, Serling, and, paradoxically, the pulps of the thirties and forties which worked that vein. I feel they are harmless. But war comics are not.

As I stated earlier, I refuse to script war stories (not that anyone has asked me, mind you!) because war is the ultimate violence in reality and I refuse to glorify it with that John-Wayne-jingoistic-bullshit-"Let's-take-that-hill-men-for-Mom-apple-pie-and-the-American-way!" That is nothing more than cheap propagandizing, cheap glorification of war, and that to me is wrong–totally, absolutely, morally, ethically wrong

Robert Kanigher has scripted God knows how many war stories in his God knows how many years in comics. Most were of the type described above,

but in an occasional Sgt. Rock story, there would be something showing the true horrors of war. Not some crap like "Make War No More" blurbs that Joe Kubert used to stick on the last panel of each war story, but real life BLAZING COMBAT-type of anti-war material.

People die in war, folks.

A bullet will kill you.

War is not SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING HORRORS or CAPTAIN SAVAGE AND HIS NIGHT RAIDERS. Guys do not run head on towards enemy guns and shells just to win one for the old gipper. They sit crouched in foxholes pissing all over themselves in fear. Look at the Viet Nam scourge if you do not believe me. Look at 55,000 bodies returned to this country in plastic bags wrapped in freaking flags. Look at the quarter of a million men who came home minus arms, legs, faces. Turn around and look at the pomp and revelery of ticker-tape parades for the men behind the armor and the desks. How can the comic book industry glorify war when all truths indicate that it stinks on ice? And how can you continue buying this filth, this pornography, when you realize these things?

Batman. Spider-Man. Wonder Woman. Superman. The Fantastic Four. All totally irrelevant. The violence portrayed there is fantasy violence. The Sub-Mariner's nose does not bleed, his lips do not crack, his eyes never bulge black and blue when a punch by Ben Grimm sends him flying through the goddamn air. There are no such things as men who fly and stop bullets, who stretch to sunflower proportions, or walk up walls, or whatever else you have. We deal with intangibles in these cases. They slip through our fingers like sand because we know that when we put down the latest issue of HERCULES UNLEASHED that all the demons and devils are gone from our lives.

We know BATLASH had a hero as violent as the next guy even though he claimed otherwise, because he had to be. You do not sell comic books if you do not spill strangely clean blood or batter at Hollywood profile faces. What kind of comic would we have had if Bat Lash had backed off everytime somebody looked cross-eyed at him? Nothing. Zilch. So it all comes down to bullshit (read: gratuitous violence) for the sake of a story.

HAWK AND DOVE did better. Dove said no to violence and, God bless his little heart, stuck to his beliefs. So what if Hawk insisted on making an ass out of himself by using his fists when it was evident that the mind would work just as well?

Comic books themselves are just harmless pieces of paper, my friends. It is the one idea of war that is so glorified in the comics that is wrong. Go ahead --have war comics--but tell the damned truth. Do not let the babes of today grow up reading such titles as OUR ARMY AT WAR, STAR SPANGLED WAR STORIES, WAR, etc., and hear about how great it is to fight for a Viet Nam or an Angola. Let them live with reality and let them make their own decisions following. Do not make them mindless, please....

Comics are by no means the sole contributor to something like a pro-war mentality--far from it. But, every bit hurts.

Especially in war.

YAHOO!
DONNERWETTER!
AWRIGHT, YA BUNCHA LOUSY GOLDBRICKS...
YAAH-
DIE YANK DOG!
OK, RATZI--THIS IS FER BROOKLYN!
ACHTUNG! SCHNELL!
TEN-HUT!
AWRIGHT, YA BUNCHA SIEG-HIELIN' GOOSE STEPPERS!
WANNA' LIVE FOREVER?
AWRIGHT, YA BUNCHA YELLA-BELLIED SONS OF TH' RISING SUN!
NIMBUS
POK
POW
PKOW
WHAM
KLANG
WHOOM
BUDDA BUDDA

"AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY ISABELLA: WAR IS HELL"

NIMBUS: What was your first inspiration for the "War is Hell" series?

TONY: Well, my first inspiration was that the "It!" strip was being cancelled (laughter), and Roy said he'd like to give me another strip and give Dick Ayers another strip; DC was doing pretty good with their war books, so would we like to do one? At that time I'd been thinking of taking a character I'd done in TALES OF THE ZOMBIE -Gilgamesh, the Eternal Warrior--and doing a war book of some sort with him. Then we came up with the idea of doing the thing in WAR IS HELL, and somewhere along the line I just kind of meshed the two and decided that in WAR IS HELL, what ever war we did would be somebody's Hell. Roy Thomas was along to give me inspiration and things and tell me when I was going too far astray. Some where along the line we added Death to the thing, and then came up with the idea of having John Kowalski commit some heinous act, or at least heinous to him, on the first day of the war, and his punishment, his Hell, would be to live throughout that war in the bodies of others, to see the war from both sides and everything. And y'know, I've always liked Deadman, I guess everybody did, today I feel that Deadman should never have been a phantom, he should've been solid- I think he would've sold better. Anyway, we talked about it--I say "we" because there's no way of telling how much I contributed, how much Roy contributed; after a number of these conferences you tend to forget--and we had a number of spring board ideas at that point. I knew pretty well that the first issue would not have John Kowalski in the body of someone else, because the first issue had to have the origin. The first and second issues were almost conceived as a pair, because I'd just read THE WINDS OF WAR by Herman Wouk, an excellent book, and there's an interesting bit where the son of an American diplomat is trying to get a Jewish family out of Poland. Fascinating stuff, because it was just a corridor they were allowed in, a safety corridor that people were permitted out of Poland in, strictly policed by the Germans, and it was literally walking a tightrope: If you went a couple of miles off the road, you could be in the middle of a battle. So I said, "I want to do something like that," and so we tried it in the second issue. As it turned out, I got so jammed up editorially that Chris Claremont had to end up scripting the whole thing. We had a number of springboards; one that we never got a chance to do would've had John Kowalski becoming a WAC nurse. We just wanted to get across that nothing was out of bounds--I mean, he could become a child, we were going to do that, right on down the line. Now, Chris Claremont took over the book, and I think he just did a magnificent job on it--I think he did it better than I would've...

NIMBUS: Have you ever told Chris that?

TONY: I've told Chris that several times I don't know whether he believes me (laughter)!

NIMBUS: As the originator of the "War is Hell" series, what were the particular influences that formulated the style of the strip?

TONY Well, as I've mentioned there was THE WINDS OF WAR by Herman Wouk, which was recommended to me by Dick

Ayers (who drew "War is Hell" initially), and it was a big influence on the comic, outlining as it did the beginning of WW2 through this American family's experiences; DC's "Enemy Ace"--how could you pass that up?--and the earlier "Sgt. Rock" stories before Bob Kanigher got into a habit of repeating himself, of doing the same story over and over again (When Kubert was editor of the books, Joe did these stories as well with no real plot to them, just the skeleton of a story. Now, Joe has done some classic stuff, and Bob Kanigher has done some nice work; it's just that in some cases, I feel, they're just the skeletons of stories.); but there were other things. Joe Kubert always drew war to look like war, he didn't have pretty heroes. I got a lot from his works, they were definitely influences. SGT. FURY was even an influence to the extent that it was a different way of doing a war book and I did like it, I liked SGT. FURY a lot--the better issues. Near the end it fell apart. What we did, though, was try to avoid what SGT. FURY was, because SGT. FURY was exactly what "War is Hell" shouldn't have been. We knew "War is Hell" shouldn't have been that light, that gung-ho. So SGT. FURY was an influence in that we specifically tried to avoid the things done in that. Also, Chris Claremont is a war-buff--I hate to use that term because it indicates somebody who really likes war, but he is really interested in it. And I think we tried to develop John Kowalski as a real person, not as a comic book character.

NIMBUS: What was John Kowalski's basic moral code?

TONY: John had a very...amoral code. I don't think he really thought about morality all that much until he died. I think that was part of it. Chris had a nice thing worked out that he came up with--a reason why Death was doing this, why he was putting Kowalski through all that--and I think it's a great idea: John Kowalski was going to be the new Death.

NIMBUS: The what? The new Death?

TONY: Yes! Death is a finite being--Death lasts a lot longer than people, but not forever. And John Kowalski had to see other people's lives and other people's deaths before he could really become Death and take over. We were going to do something like that, guest-starring Death and John Kowalski in a modern-day book, maybe GHOST RIDER or something like that. We had talked about it on and off, just to tie up the series. I still may do it somewhere, or Chris may do it, but we would've eventually given a reason for the whole thing. Chris was gonna start dropping hints to that effect in various magazines.

NIMBUS: I suppose that would've ended the series?

TONY: Yeah, probably. It would have had

to, I mean. You could still go on, but the thing is that it would've been far in the future. Like, if Chris had known that the last issue he did was going to be the last issue, he would've tied it up there. I wish they would've given him one more issue--it's something that happens a lot. I'm going to stray from the subject for a brief moment. In the "Living Mummy" series, I got off the series because I knew where I wanted it to end: I wanted to cure the Living Mummy in SUPERNATURAL THRILLERS No. 15. So I got off the book, and unfortunately or fortunately, I don't know which, it got cancelled. If I'd stayed on it, I could have ended the book the way I'd wanted.

NIMBUS: What about Death in the series--could you go into his or its moral code?

TONY: Death appeared to be very callous, very sarcastic--I don't think he was, I think Death felt the pain of the people who died. If you're going to be a death-god--not just a random butcherer, but you're going to be Death--you have to care, because if death doesn't mean anything, then you don't mean anything. If the expiration of a human life has no meaning, then the entity in charge of the passing of human life has no meaning. So I think Death could feel sorrow for the people; I think he was trying to harden John Kowalski. Chris may have some different ideas here, but I really feel that Death was a very compassionate being, and just playing the heartless bastard because one of the things he had to do was toughen John Kowalski. It's like--if a person's time has come to die, if the situation demands that somebody dies, you can be compassionate, you can care, but you can't say "No", because death is a very necessary function. And I really think that Death (in the strip) was the good guy. I used to tell people that Death was the hero of the strip, because he was the most visual characters and everything, and I really meant that.

NIMBUS: You mention death having to have meaning--that's an often-used literary device, that death or tragedy has to have, in a given story's context, a satisfying reason. Any comments?

TONY: I really believe in that. Very seldom do people die in my stories without that death having meaning. I hate wholesale slaughter, I hate when people die for no reason. I like for people to go out well, I like them to go out in such a way that you care about them. It's like the Mary Wolfman plot device in DRACULA, where he tells you about the person before the person dies; he gives their death some "meaning".

NIMBUS: You mentioned earlier your character Death as being finite. Has Death lived through other wars?

TONY: Yes; we figured he'd lived for a thousand years, which means he would've seen World War I where John Kowalski's father died, the Spanish-American War, things like that. He would have seen most of the modern-day wars. Figure, I would say, anything from the Battle of Hastings on.

NIMBUS: So as a character, then, what would Death have had to say about the morality of war?

TONY: I never got into that--I don't think it really had an opinion on the morality of war: I mean, it was there. I guess an entity who has compassion for life, though--and I think Death did- would find war disgusting and evil and a blight and everything else. I would say yes, Death was probably more anti-war than a lot of entities. Again, if you put a value on human life, you have to hate war, and I think Death did hate war, but there wasn't much he could do about it: Death doesn't control lives, he's there at the end of them, when the situation says, "This person's time has come," but he can't control lives, and so he has no control over war. To Death it's just...more business.

NIMBUS: Death valued life very much, then?

TONY: Well, since Death hated war, I think he'd have had to. Otherwise--if you're not against war, then you're putting a low value on human life; and, as I said, Death placed a very high value on human life.

NIMBUS: Might Death in the series ever have come across a situation where war or even retalliation was necessary; what would Death have thought?

TONY: I don't think he would've cared for it--he couldn't have, the way I'm describing him. It's a problem--you couldn't really answer that. You can say you're anti-war, but then, what do you do when somebody's trying to take away everything you hold dear? It's not an easy question--I wish to Hell it were, but it's not.

I don't know how Death would feel about retaliation: I don't think he ever took sides. Thinking over the character, he wouldn't have sides, he would've seen the war for what it was: War. The reasons wouldn't have mattered to him much. I would say that Death is the only entity that could say fully that war is 100% evil, and mean it. I don't think John Kowalski could've. I think that one of the things John Kowalski would've had to learn, that both sides could be at fault, that there could be heroism on both sides, would've vanished in the fact that in the end it doesn't really matter--what's tragic is the immense loss of human life.

NIMBUS: Where were John Kowalski's loyalties throughout the series?

TONY: Well, John Kowalski was an American by birth, but not too happy with America because of the fact that he was drummed out of the Marines. I think he would've instinctively, though, being of Polish descent and American birth, have hated the Germans. And I think he would've had to learn--as he did learn when he was in the body of a German--that the "enemy" are people with lives and loves and everything else. I think John Kowalski's loyalties were on the side of the Allies, right through the series. I think in time that they would have shifted around, not to a point where he'd be on the side of the Axis, but where he wasn't on any side, that he'd just find death tedious, a waste. He would have to have gotten to a point where Death was, where it didn't matter who's "right" and who's "wrong," that war is a tragic waste of human life. And when Kowalski would have come around to that point, I think he would have been ready to assume the mantle of being Death.

NIMBUS: You know, a lot of times, nations seem to make a game out of war, fighting with rules, specifications, demilitarized zones and the like. It seems they use weapons that kill individuals because they're too afraid to use the real power of push-button warfare. The best-seller GAMES NATIONS

PLAY, as a matter of fact, pointed this out quite particularly. Any comments on that aspect?

TONY: Well, going to the title of the book, WAR IS HELL, remember that Hell has been described in literature as chaos--totally illogical. And the gaming, the political gaming, is illogical when all those lives are at stake, so war is Hell, war is chaos, war is illogical, and there's no rationale for it.

So yes, I think it's a game at times; we can't deny it. I always wanted to do a splash page with--Joe Kubert did something like it once, in one of the "Enemy Ace" stories--Death there on a chessboard. Again, war is a very deadly game; but I don't think Death played it as a game, and I don't think John Kowalski played it as a game. The little people don't play it as a game, it's the leaders who do.

NIMBUS: Did the strip tend to say that war breeds atrocities or that man is capable of atrocities without war to excercise those capabilities?

TONY: No, we thought that war breeds atrocities. Obviously, man commits atrocities anyway without a war--crime in the streets, wanton murder, that sort of thing--but I think war helps. If nothing else, war gives people an opportunity. Lt. Calley wouldn't have had the opportunity to butcher a village if he was a postman in New Jersey. Maybe some men will always have it in them to commit atrocities, but in a lot of cases they'll never have the chance to carry out what they're capable of.

NIMBUS: Historians have pointed out that in past wars, neither side has ever been totally correct, totally clean. But what about the methods of war used by different sides? American POW camps were reportedly hospitable and clean, while German POW and concentration camps had squalor, degeneracy, and a resultant behavioral sink. Any comments on that?

TONY: Well, you have a few things to consider. America was a much more affluent society; I think that's one of the reasons our prisoners of war were better taken care of. There was money available. Germany, on the other hand, was just coming out of economic ruin--that's how Hitler got to power. They just didn't have the money; maybe they wouldn't have treated their prisoners any differently if they did have they money, and they certainly wouldn't have treated the Jews any differently But I think the Allied prisoners of war would have been a more affluent society.

NIMBUS: Then maybe Hitler wouldn't have gotten to power in the first place. But what can you say about the various methods of war utilized by both sides?

TONY: People die whether you hit them over the head with a rock and split their skull or you shoot them or you atomize them. You don't fight a clean war--people die, no matter how you kill

them. I don't think you can say, "This side fought cleaner than the other." because the goal was still death. As I said in the text piece I wrote for the first issue, armies exist for one reason to kill other armies, and people get caught in the middle. It'd be nice if armies weren't composed of people, but unfortunately, they are. So no, I don't think you can say one side is using cleaner weapons-with any weapon, the purpose is to kill.

NIMBUS: You wouldn't say, then, that the "War is Hell" series consisted of twenty pages of fun, fun, fun, would you?

TONY: This is going to sound strange, but I think we did a disservice to our readers in "War is Hell" in that we failed to entertain them I think people pick up comics for light reading, I really do. I try to put a lot of action and excitement in my other stuff. I think Chris and I got into a personal philosophy trip in "War is Hell." Maybe the audience might've wanted a different type of war book. So I think we did it wrong, and I don't think "War is Hell" should've been done as a color comic I think it should've been a black and white. It should not have even been tied into the other black and whites, it should've been done as an adult comic

NIMBUS: Jim Warren did something like that a few years ago...

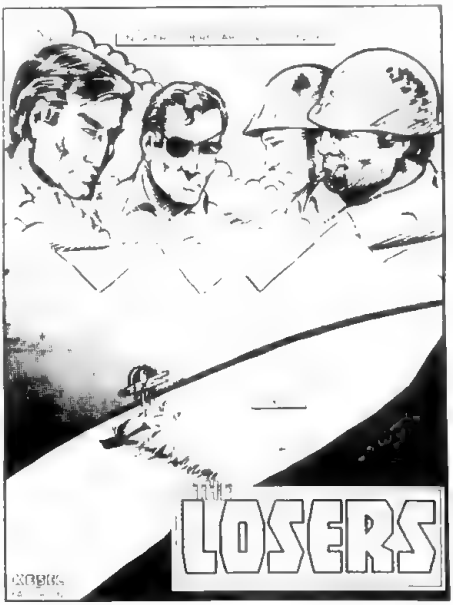
TONY: ...BLAZING COMBAT

NIMBUS: ...right, and it was anti-war and got a lot of flak from all over for that reason, because we were in the middle of Viet Nam at the time. Did the series, "War is Hell," derive any influence from that particular source?

TONY: Yeah, and it's funny that I don't have any issues of them; I read a friend's copy of each issue. The stories were the standard shock ending type, but there was a reality to them--a lot of research, a lot of fine artwork. I would have loved to have done "War is Hell" in, as I said, a magazine format--I really wish I could buy back several properties from Marvel, especially "War is Hell," and do them up right. Now, I wouldn't want to produce "War is Hell" any other way than the way Chris and I were doing it, but I think it could've been done more faithfully in black and white and without some things. I wouldn't have done the letter column in Marvelese or anything, for example. In fact, the book probably shouldn't have been done at Marvel. I respect Roy Thomas immensely for trying the book; it went about six issues, I believe, and I think it was a damn fine book and it's one of those things where you wouldn't expect a company like Marvel, which is so overly commercial, to try it. I'm very surprised it's like the science-fiction book (UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION fsl); I wouldn't have expected Marvel to try it. I'm glad they did. I still think "War is Hell" probably could have been done better outside Marvel, but that's not Marvel's fault; a lot of the fault lies in me--we should've discussed it in other ways. It's weird when you're working for one company exclusively as I was at the time, that you give them all your ideas but I really wish I had held out "War is Hell" until I could've presented it in a better format But my admiration for Marvel in even doing the book is boundless. Roy felt, though we had an "argument" over part of it, even that there wasn't enough war stuff in it

NIMBUS: "Argument" in quotation marks?

TONY: "Argument" in quotation marks. We occasionally disagree. You can't get two creative people in a room and have them talk for any length of time without them disagreeing on something But as I was saying it was a misunderstanding on my



part mostly, because Roy didn't really mean that--Roy seemed to feel that there should've been more tanks and action and stuff, and I said, "Roy, I don't want to do 'Sgt. Rock' "; and I did not. Roy gave me leeway; maybe that's why the book bombed, maybe the readers wanted another "Sgt. Rock." (laughter)

About the only real objection I have is that I really wish we'd have had a new logo on the book with the issue we took over, because a lot of people, I think, didn't realize there was new material in the book. I would've liked also--of course, we were doing so many new projects and we couldn't publicize everything--to have somehow publicized it a lot more. Would've been nice to have gotten a mention in Stan's Soapbox! (laughter)

NIMBUS: The pencillers who worked on the strip--Herb Trimpe, Dick Ayers, Don Perlin, and George Evans: Did their personal philosophies reflect on the work they did?

TONY: Well, I worked mostly with Dick Ayers on the thing. I don't think Dick really agreed with the philosophy of the book. He fought in WW2; he wasn't able to see it as the thing as a whole being wrong, or that there are always two sides. I didn't go through WW2, the war I lived through was the Viet-Nam War, which was totally wrong. Dick's war was a war he was proud to fight in; my war, even though I didn't fight in it, was a war that I despised. I think that had a lot to do with our differences.

I really didn't work with the other artists on the book. Don Perlin seemed very enthusiastic about it, though, and I really think the "Winterkill" issue (WAR IS HELL No. II--fsl) is just a magnificent job on Don's part. Don really had a good feel for the book. Herb Trimpe--he loves drawing war stories. I think it's all the planes and tanks and stuff. I think I do do Herb's philosophy, because he did that "Unknown Soldier" strip in NEWSDAY (a Long Island newspaper which came out every Sunday, and they had a bunch of people doing stories; Barry Smith was doing some sort of strip for them, Herb was, a couple of other people). Herb was doing "The Unknown Soldier" or something like that, I can't recall the name right off, but it had a skull-faced soldier and it was an anti-war strip. So yeah, I would say Herb's philosophy was pretty close to mine and Chris' on it. George Evans did an issue; again, I didn't work with him, so I don't know George's philosophy. Nobody likes war, so in that sense we were all in agreement, that war is not a nice thing; we tried to get that across without putting "Make War No More" on the end of every story.

NIMBUS: Do you think there was a high degree of realism in the books?

TONY: It was real, there was realism there. As I said, "The Corridor" was based on something that really happened; Dunkirk was done faithfully in "Today's A Lovely Day to Die" (WAR IS HELL No. I3--fsl). "Winterkill" was fictitious; it never really happened.

NIMBUS: I've heard of it having fooled some people.

TONY: It read real, because that's what could've happened under those circumstances. So I would say yes, I think it was one of the more realistic comics to have been done.

NIMBUS: Even in dialogue?

TONY: Dialogue and everything--a little Marvelese there, when characters tend to say things stronger than real people do, but it was pretty faithful.

NIMBUS: Aside from the obvious, were there any particular messages you wanted to get across in "War is Hell"?

TONY: Y'know, the title of the book pretty much sums it up--war is hell, war is rotten, don't do it, it'll make nasties on your face...

NIMBUS: Wait a minute. (pause) "Make nasties on your face?"

TONY: (laughter) That's a Len Wein line--I don't know what it means, but he says it a lot! But anyway, war is rotten, that's about all I can say. I (pause) I would feel good (pause) if one person as a result of reading those books decided, "Hey, I'm not going to play this game! If you want to have a war, I'm not going to show up." Basically, it's one of the simplest books to sum up: War is hell. Don't do it.

NIMBUS: Well, what would happen if the culture we're in suddenly decided to take you up on that, and then got attacked by some less enlightened culture?

TONY: They'd probably change their minds awfully fast! (laughter) I believe in a certain amount of defense, but I can't rationalize it in terms of big armies. I know that if some guy tries to attack me on the street, I'd try and defend myself. Again, it's not a simple question to answer; you give the general thing and hope people can find a way to apply it. In specific instances, it gets very hard to say, "War is hell, don't do it."

NIMBUS: So what's in the future for your concept, do you suppose. Anything at all?

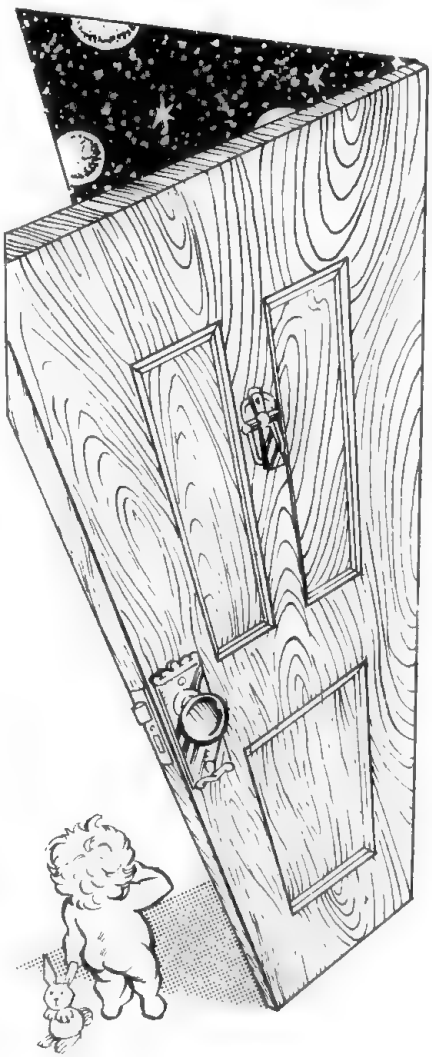
TONY: Nothing in the immediate future. I've got a war book in my head right now called MAN O' WAR that I'd like to do when I've got the time to do the research properly. I suggested the idea to Len Wein when he was editor and again to Marv Wolfman just recently. Unfortunately, Marv has a new strip coming up--SKYWOLF--and wants to use the name for a villain in it. Unless I can find something to blackmail Marv with, I'll have to come up with a new name--or do the book for another comics company before he can use the name.

NIMBUS: How would it be different from "War is Hell"?

TONY: More action-oriented, I would think, more commercial. But it will have some similarities, such as that it will be very story-oriented as well. Every issue of WAR IS HELL, while retaining several continuous elements, was a story, complete in one issue; that's the way this book'll be, complete in one issue, stories with real persons, real things happening--and the thing is, it could almost be done as a fantasy book, too.

NIMBUS: Good luck. Any comments in summation?

TONY: Buy Bonds?



NEVILLE 77
S. DE LA ROSA

PROTEAN THOUGHTS

by dave fryxell

MAKE COMICS, NOT WAR

When was the last time you heard someone, leaning back in his chair and letting his eyes mist with nostalgia, say, "Remember COMBAT CASEY? I really used to love good old Casey when I was a kid." People reminisce about Captain Marvel, Superman, Captain America, even more obscure characters like Green Lama. They think fondly of old westerns like Hopalong Cassidy and Tim Holt.

War comics, however, do not benefit from the same sort of nostalgia that other types of comics do. There are no hardback collections of THOSE WONDERFUL WAR COMICS.

Interestingly, war comics titles are even more short-lived than other adventure comic books; their successes are far more modest. There are no war comic versions of Superman in terms of popularity. As far as I know, there isn't a single war title that's been running as long as DETECTIVE, ADVENTURE, ACTION, or WORLD'S FINEST. A war comic, compared to its peers, can be considered a success if it lasts five years, even with sales well below those of the more popular super-hero and humor titles.

And yet war comics seem to be omni-present. When I was buying my first copies of SPIDERMAN and FANTASTIC FOUR, there on the shelves right next to them were titles like OUR ARMY AT WAR and SGT. FURY and ATTACK!. Almost every comics company of the last two or three decades has had at least one war book, often a whole line of them. DC/National has had Sgt. Rock (sergeant is a favorite rank for comic book war heroes, possibly because it's so easily abbreviated for squeezing onto covers and into captions, perhaps because it's just high enough to let the hero command somebody, without making him one of the elite) and the Haunted Tank and the unusual Enemy Ace. Marvel of course was led by the aforementioned Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandoes, but also had good old Captain Savage and his Leatherneck Raiders (despite the similarity in title, a failure--perhaps because of the elevated rank of the star). Charlton went in for more depersonalized books, like BATTLEFIELD ACTION and ARMY ATTACK. Even short-lived Seaboard had BLAZING BATTLE TALES.

There are always a few war comics on the stands, for the simple reason that war action is one of the staples of heroic adventure, and has been for centuries. Alexander Dumas' THREE MUSKETEERS would have made a good war/intrigue comic. James Fenimore Cooper used war action in many of his adventures. War is a basic setting for men in danger, just like the American West, another comic book staple.

War comics are relatively easy to do, and are basically interchangeable. Focus on one guy, or a small group like the Howling Commandoes, and have your character(s) face and overcome danger from the enemy. It is much the same as the superheroes' basic formula: meet-villain-fight-villain-brief defeat-fight-again-triumph. In a war comic, you don't even have to come up with new villains every time. Moreover, the bad guys are identifiably bias; everyone knows, from old movies and maybe from history or experience, that the Nazis and the "Japs" are bad.

This basic interchangeability also explains why war comics rarely "take off" and become big hits. There is nothing memorable about most war comics. When one is much the same as another, there is no room for nostalgia, either. The war comic of today are pretty much the same as those of ten or twenty years ago.

All the titles are even the same. ATTACK had three different incarnations. "Battle" is a favorite word. Who would not just love reminiscing about BATTLE, BATTLE ACTION, the can't-miss combination BATTLE ATTACK, BATTLE BRADY, BATTLE CRY, BATTLEFIELD, BATTLEFIELD ACTION, BATTLE FIRE, BATTLEFRONT, BATTLEGROUND, BATTLE HEROES, BATTLE REPORT, BATTLE SQUADRON, BATTLE STORIES, BILL BATTLE, and BLAZING BATTLE TALES?

How can you be nostalgic when you can't even keep them apart? "Combat," "fighting," and "war" are other favorite words for titles.

What war comics lack in long-lasting individual popularity, though, they make up for in sheer numbers. Every branch of the armed services has been accounted for--there was ARMY ATTACK and ARMY WAR HEROES; the Navy probably had the most titles, with NAVY ACTION, NAVY COMBAT, NAVY PATROL, NAVY TALES, and NAVY TASK FORCE, among others; the Marines were featured in MARINES IN ACTION and MARINES IN BATTLE, to name only two. The Air Force, a more recent branch of the service, had AMERICAN AIR FORCES. There was even the joint ARMY AND NAVY.

The latter, notably, was one of the few genuine war titles during the Second World War. The Golden Age of superhero comics was, similarly, hardly a hey-dey for war comics, presumably because the public had enough of the realistic portrayal of war in newsreels. What comics featured instead were superhero books where the heroes fought war villains, like CAPTAIN AMERICA and USA. BOY COMMANDOES was hardly grim realism.

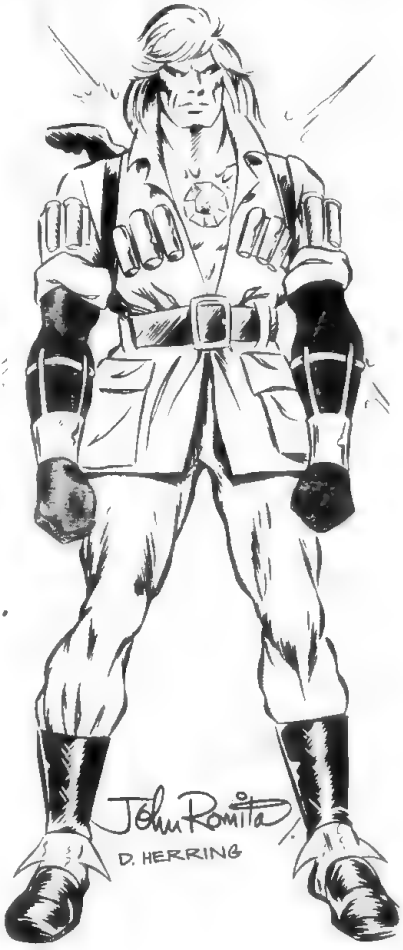
With the war over, however, combat could again seem romantic and exhilarating; World War II was just far enough in the past by 1952 or so for boys who had not been born in the worst of the war years to think of World War II as a time of great adventure The Korean War may have even helped to spark the war comics boom, since it was on the whole less terrible and the country was less completely involved War comics really took hold for the first time in that period, perhaps fading a bit with the next generation in 1957 or so, but booming enough in the early sixties to take a permanent niche in the American comics industry. Indicative of the trend is ALL-AMERICAN COMICS, which in 1948 dropped its super hero format to become ALL-AMERICAN WESTERN and then jumped on the warwagon in 1952 to become ALL-AMERICAN MEN OF WAR for 15 years.

During the Viet Nam War, comics companies were caught in an awkward position, selling war comics when war was no longer a fashionable literary commodity. Some tried to make anti-war comics; war comics, however, have always sold on the excitement of war, not the horror of it, and these titles were not exactly blockbusters.

Remember "Make War No More" on the last panels of the DC war comics...?

With the most recent war fading into memory, one can expect a boom in war comics again. War is exciting as long as you aren't out there being killed, or your brother, or your father.

A few artists even seem to do their best work in the war comics vein. Joe Kubert makes his fighting men look taut and worn and gives a cinematic pace to the action. Russ Heath achieves, at his best, a photographic quality that puts the reader into the middle of the story. John Severin, with his intricate ink work and painstaking historical detail, does by far



his best work in this genre.

Severin brings to mind the whole historical aspects of war comics. Along with westerns they are among the few comics which are almost never set in the present day. Generally, war comics are really World War II comics. Using the Second World War as a setting gives the stories historical familiarity, a variety of combat zones, and villains that are easy to caricature. Little research is needed for the sloppier war comics; all one needs to do is make the characters look like soldiers, give our guys green uniforms and the Germans grey ones (don't forget the funny helmets), and throw in conventional-looking tanks and stuff.

While war comics have been a perenial comics genre, they have produced little of artistic or literary note. The titles that fit the formulas sell the best, and the craftsman who can do his best work within such a rigid formula is rare indeed. There have been exceptions, though often they have been outside the usual war comics formula, and thus short-lived. Many of the EC war comics in the 1950's were artistically memorable. A few DC series stand out, particularly the strikingly different Enemy Ace strip. Some

work on SGT. FURY is exceptional; and there are a few other examples, such as Warren's brief BLAZING COMBAT.

One of the few areas where war comics excel is where they attempt to go beyond the familiar costume drama and bring historical realism and accuracy to the printed page. Some innovators have even set their war stories in other wars, despite an onus of extra research that this brings (Civil War soldiers in WWII uniforms would be spotted as errors even by the most formula-dulled comics reader). There is a certain fascination in revelling in war related minutae -exhibited in letters to the editor pointing out that the PX7 Injurer Flying Fortress had six wing guns instead of four. Some small part of the continued survival of war comics may be due to genuine historical interest.

War, like other situations of men in stress, offers opportunities for exploring human character. Profoundity, however, does not draw seven-year-olds well to the readership. Blazing battle action does, so profundity is usually sacrificed. The character revelations in war comics are as superficial as those in most other comics genres. War comics deal with the basics: courage (man saves buddy from Germans) and cleverness (platoon leader outwits Germans). If a writer or artist wants to go beyond these, he has to hide it with a lot of combat action.

War comics are popular for the same reason that most adventure comics are popular--vicarious thrills. They are limited to a fairly rigid formula, which, while preventing them from achieving spectacular sales, pretty well guarantees a couple of years of marginally profitable life. Within the formula, there is not much room for creativity. Outside the formula, there is not much money to be made.

War comics are like war movies and war novels: they succeed, but they don't set their sights very high. We really have no right to expect anything more than basic stories, competently told; the optomists among us may keep looking if they wish for a comics FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS or ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT.

And the miracle-seekers can go on hoping for a comics version of JOHNNY GOT HIS GUN for years and years and years....

CROSS-ROADS

Dear Frank,

I enjoyed your article "Man...and E-Man" in NIMBUS TWO. Although I was a science major in high school and science is still a hobby of mine I found myself lost when I attempted to follow your explanation for the origin of E-Man. I'm glad that all I have to do is create and leave the analysis of my creations to others.

The only error I found was that you credited me with some of the artwork on the first E-Man cover. Joe Staton did all of the cover and E-Man interior art. Joe was kind enough to put my name on the first cover along with his out of courtesy.

Again, thanks for the kind words.
Best,

Nicola Cuti
Charlton Comics
Derby, Conn.

(Our thanks to you, Nick, for the time you took helping us prepare our article. And thank you as well for E-Man.--fsl)

Dear Frank,

A Capt. Atom centerspread? But I liked it, I liked it! Tell Sam and Ric they've got talent, 'cause it's a fact most surely evident!

Bill Steinbeck
Charleston, W. Va.

(The centerspread was done twice up, would you believe???--fsl)

Dear Frank,

I don't have to tell you NIMBUS TWO was excellent, you should realize that. What I want to know is why your publishing schedule is so damned erratic?

James McDonough
Chicago, Ill.

(A lot of things, money mostly. That, coupled with a tight schedule at WVU, working on concert and films committees, yearbook, pursuing a projected doctorate in speech communications, joining a fraternity, running a pretty enjoyable social life, and editing, of all things, a newsletter for a local magicians' club. Next question?--fsl)

Dear Frank,

A few thoughts on NIMBUS TWO:

I had gotten your first issue and was immediately surprised by the excellent Pete Gillis article on Westerns. The fact that I knew nothing and cared less about the genre seemed to fade as I became carried away by Pete's tugging style, his fluid conjectures. I became, in short, interested, and as such think quite highly of that article.

Now, NIMBUS TWO has done much the same. I knew Adam Strange only from a reprint or two that stumbled into my hands; Hoy Murphey's fine article pulled me into added interest. Likewise for the E-Man article--damn, but your complexities are intriguing! Mike Friedrich had as well some insights to add from a unique standpoint, and the Don McGregor interview was outstanding.

Seeing as how an editor's job is to devise the just-right set-up of a magazine to provide maximum appeal both visually and intellectually, I think that, despite the nimor flaws definitely there, you've done a great job of filling that precarious editor's chair.

Much thanks for a job well done!

Louis Lowell
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Frank,

I enjoyed NIMBUS TWO, particularly the interview with God. Keep up the good work, and I'm looking forward to NIMBUS THREE.

Best wishes,

Mike Grell
DC Comics
NYC, NY

(Will this do?--fsl)

Dear Frank,

Don McGregor's one thing, but Pete Gillis is out of his mind!

Kurt Joacobis
Lodi, New Jersey

That wraps it up. I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have. I'll take comments at 947 Maple Dr. No. 15 Morgantown, W. Va. 26505. Nimbus Two is also available from the same address and contains: Adam Strange; the thinking man's hero by Hoy Murphey, Man and E-Man by Frank Lovece & Nick Cuti, Cosmic Crossroads by Mike Friedrich, An Interview with God--the original cosmic character by Peter B. Gillis, An Interview with Don McGregor, and other articles by Paul Kupperberg & Dave Fryxell. Art is by K. Pollard, S. Leialoha, Arv Jones, A. Bradford, M. Zeck, J. Staton, J. Byrne, T. Corrigan, R. Cruz, F. Cirocco, S. de la Rosa, D. Vohland and others. Price is $1.

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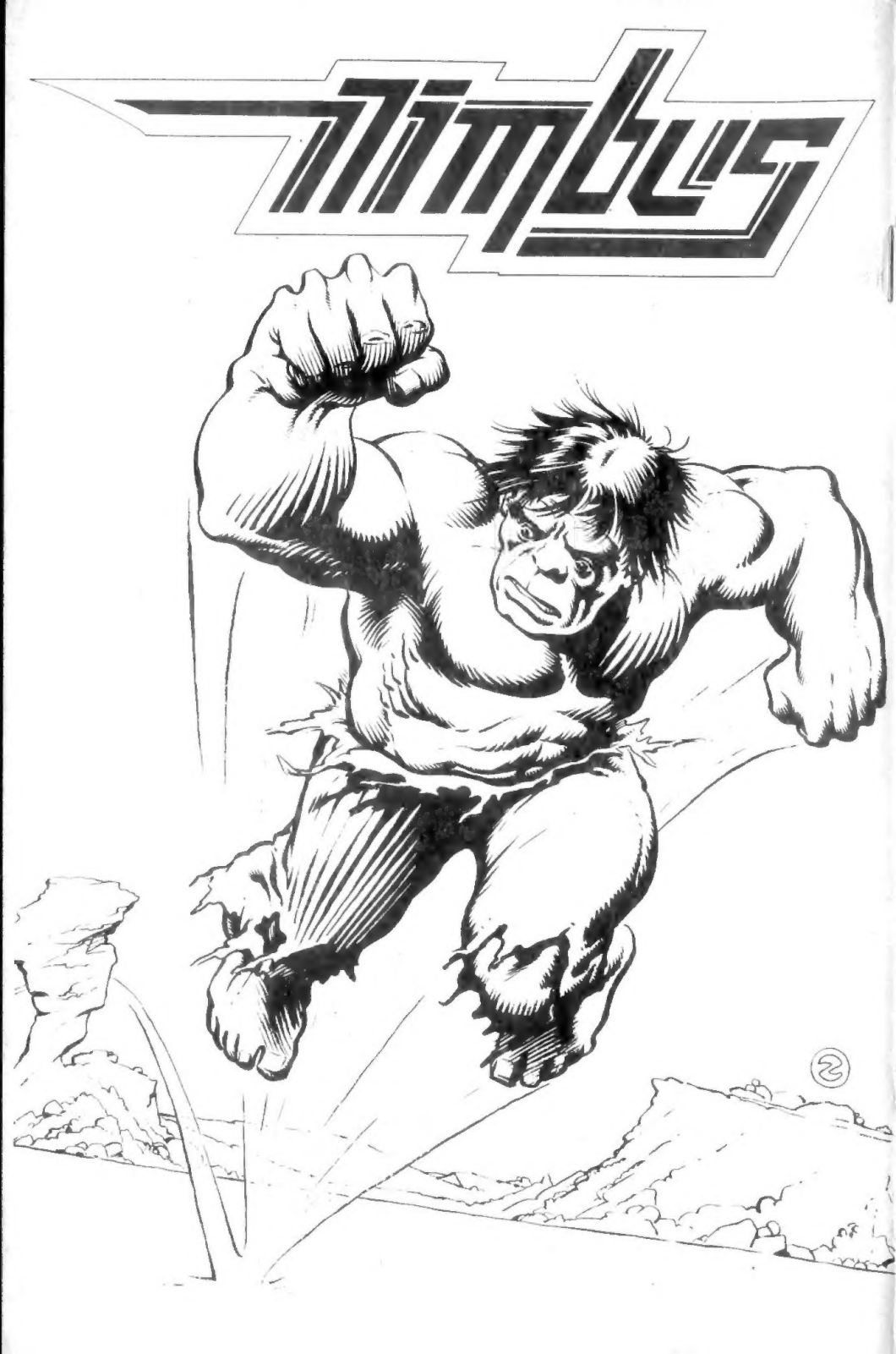
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